

**THE ROLE OF STORY/STORYTELLING IN
CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION**

**A Professional Project
Presented to
The Faculty of The School of Theology at Claremont**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry**

**by
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1980**

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

In a world of tremendous change, acute pain, and oppressive injustice, Christians must live out of a spiritual discipline that is conscious, consistent, and integrated. Yet we are faced with the dilemma of which specific discipline to engage in which integrates our human experiences with our faith. This project explores the relationship between a contemporary Christian theology based upon experience and a viable Christian spirituality based upon experience.

My thesis is that story and storytelling are excellent media for accomplishing an integration of belief and action which can be useful and meaningful for people in the local parish. Story and storytelling are utterly appropriate for integrating belief and action because they arise out of basic human experience. Human experience is narrative in character, and thus an adequate theology and spirituality must also be narrative in character. As we become familiar and comfortable with stories and storytelling, we become more human, more theological, more spiritual.

The project begins with some epistemological and metaphysical foundations for human existence which allow for the development of a theology intelligible to contemporary people. Congruencies between those foundations and the narrative quality of human existence are explored next. Some

observations are made and conclusions drawn regarding human experience and revelation. A discussion then follows in which an understanding of Christian spirituality is developed, also linking spirituality to the narrative quality of human existence. We then proceed to establish the value of disciplines for Christian spirituality and determine how storytelling can be a valuable spiritual discipline. Specific exercises for individuals and small groups are suggested. The project concludes with a discussion of the relevance of story/storytelling for the local parish. Some sociological ramifications of story/storytelling are pointed out. Finally, we develop a "storytelling praxis" to further explicate the applicability and practicability of a storytelling spiritual discipline for a local parish struggling to enact God's will in a world of change, pain, and injustice.

INTRODUCTION

Problem Addressed by Project

This project deals with the problem of a lack of meaningful integration between theology and spirituality in the local church. A Christian spirituality which is appropriate for modern people needs to be carefully developed and used in our churches. In my own life I experience a great confusion regarding spirituality and spiritual disciplines. There are so many systems and ideas to choose from I feel as though I am at a great smorgasbord where it is impossible to fully enjoy one dish because the selection is too large and I can't make up my mind which kind of food I want anyway.

Many Christians like myself have become immobilized by the variety of choices offered them in our culture to lead a "spiritual" or "peaceful" life. With no firm basis upon which to make their choices, contemporary Christians find the living of a simple lifestyle thwarted by a complicated and pluralistic society. Today we can hardly call Christianity a "lifestyle," but simply one more item on the already crowded smorgasbord of weekly activities. In choosing how we want to live, we often end up with a very unsatisfactory hodge-podge of experiences with no meaningful connection.

Yet we need and desire a lifestyle that is conscious, consistent, and integrated. Spirituality seeks to fulfill these needs and desires, but of course, how to go about it is the question. Here we want to particularly and intentionally choose disciplines, tools, and methods from a specifically Christian perspective. In making such choices, we will want a Christian theology which is genuinely relevant to our experience. Too often a gap remains between what we believe about God, Christ, the community of believers, etc., and what we experience as we live out our daily existence. The relationship between what we believe and what we experience may get us into a "chicken-egg" kind of controversy (which came first?), but that is because they are so intimately related. Deemphasize one, and the other inevitably suffers.

My project will explore the relationship between a contemporary Christian theology based upon experience and a visible Christian spirituality based upon experience. I believe that the integration of theology and spirituality is a worthy and relevant project for local churches where pastors and lay people seek to authentically and intentionally live out a specifically Christian faith. As the Christian community attempts to minister in and to a world of rapid change and painful realities, it will need a spirituality which will guide people to appropriate responses.

My thesis is that story and storytelling are

excellent mediums for accomplishing an integration of belief and action which can be useful and meaningful for people in the local parish. Story and storytelling are utterly appropriate for integrating belief and action because they arise out of basic human experience. As we shall see, human experience is narrative in character, and thus an adequate theology and spirituality must also be narrative in character. As we become familiar and comfortable with stories and storytelling, we become more human, more theological, more spiritual.

Definition of Major Terms

"Christian spirituality" will designate what I mean by a Christian lifestyle of a whole person, a lifestyle rooted in the reality of God as its source, guide, and exhorter. A Christian spirituality will recognize the unique agency of Jesus Christ as God acting in the world, and seek to align each believer with that agent. Such endeavor will call for specific disciplines which predispose or open or guide one toward God in truth and light. Clues for such disciplines are, of course, found in our Biblical and Biblically based traditions.

Biblically speaking, the spirit animates the lives of all creatures. God inspires all persons with God's "ruach"--breath or spirit. Spirit qualifies our lives as human beings, and in some ways varies in its manifestations

from individual to individual. The understanding of "spirituality" in the Bible arises out of a recognition of our ultimate source in God and asserts that when we forget that link upon which our very lives depend, we sin and suffer dismayingly consequences. Thus, one clue in our search for the meaning of spirituality will be a process of remembering our dependence on God. Useful disciplines for accomplishing this goal include worship and study.

Another clue will be found in considering the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Here the spirit supports and undergirds Christians as a helper. We are told that we may rely on the spirit to help us live in obedience to God's will. Disciplines useful for keeping us in touch with this comforting spirit include prayer and meditation.

When we forget or fall short or become too comfortable, the spirit may appear as discomforter. The spirit demands repentance and new direction in our lives, sending us forth to tasks of God's own choosing. Here we may add to our list of disciplines fasting, contemplation, interpreting dreams, and service.

"Theology" refers to those metaphysical and epistemological principles that undergird Christian faith, making it possible to develop a convincing doctrine of God for modern people.

I will rely on American theology in this project from many different sources which nevertheless fall into

two main categories: "process theism" and "narrative theology." Process theism takes metaphysics and thus the reliability of discussions about God very seriously. It maintains that a theology relevant (necessary!) to modern people may be formulated based upon empiricism broadly defined to include all aspects of human experience. Narrative theology takes individual persons very seriously and the complex of relations and structures of meaning that form the fabric of their lives. Narrative theology seeks to recognize and analyze human patterns to make meaning explicit and living more satisfying. We may name this task a "theology" because it deals with ultimate aims or meanings in human lives--that is, the underlying bases which animate and motivate all our lives in unique ways. The two theological enterprises have much in common. Each takes context very seriously. Each is interested in basic meaning systems--process theism in a universal sense (from insignificant puffs of matter to God), narrative theology in a narrower or more specific sense (human beings). Each is interested in human experience as our best key to reality.

The soundness of theology must be addressed first, so that tenets of Christian faith will not be rejected out of hand as nonliteral and therefore false. If a theology that is consistent with everyday life can be intelligently and cogently developed, then modern people will have a

context into which they may fit specifically Christian claims about Jesus and his redemptive efficacy.

"Story/Storytelling" indicates what it means to be human. To be human means to be involved in a story and to know it. We inherently tell stories because we alone among the creatures of the earth see the present rising out of a past, heading into a future.

To say that human beings exist in some story is not to say that the story is altogether of our own creation. I hold that we do experience reality on a primary level (not dependent on sensory organs) as does every other creature. Yet human beings perceive this primary experience, reflect on it, and symbolically represent it. When we experience ourselves as responding to reality, we realize our reflection on the response is affected both by our previous symbolizations of it and by possibilities for new symbolizations of it.

Thus a story forms the boundaries of our lives. Authentic existence must include acknowledging and investigating those boundaries while at the same time creating more adequate boundaries. We may then say that the process of story/storytelling is ultimately a theology of limits. Story/storytelling recognizes that we live within limits and yet may transcend these. A theology of limits struggles with the meaningfulness of our life--our story. I believe we create meaning out of meaning, more or less adequately.

Our discussion here forms the background for the importance of language, symbolization, epistemology, cultural anthropology and a theology which undergirds and gives meaning to them all.

Work Previously Done in the Field--
A Brief History of Formative Issues

From the beginnings of its life, the Christian church has been greatly concerned with the conundrum of myth and history. Myth has seldom been exalted in Christian theology, while history has been played over and against myth in an effort to separate Christianity from "pagan religions." Of course, myth has always been of great value to ancient human beings.

As one theologian has said,

Myth has been cosmic poetic theology. It was a statement about life told as a story about gods, theology projected upon the screen of heaven. It created a vision of life. It gave whole cultures a frame in which they could think and play and in which their imagination could grow. The myths had been superb creations of human perception and artistic insight. . . .¹

These stories raised the great issue of binary opposites in human life to a grand scale--so that humans might explore the depths of the tragedy and joy in life and death, beginnings and endings, body and spirit, love and hate, good and evil, etc. But such stories were understood

¹Samuel Laeuchli, "Christianity and the Death of Myth," in Tony Stoneburner (ed.) Seminar on Parable, Myth and Language (Cambridge, MA: Church Society for College Work, 1968), p. 8.

on a prehistorical, prephilosophical level, simply rooted in human speech and in the social and psychological predicament of human beings. Inevitably, as humans came to understand themselves as having a history, they began to question the myths on historical grounds. Our Judeo-Christian heritage is the greatest myth-denying religion, understood in this sense. For the saga of the gods becomes the saga of one God, a God not outside or beyond history, but actively participating in history, finally actually becoming an historical man. When myth becomes history, it is no longer myth.

Of course, much if not all the content of the first century Christian message is now itself regarded as myth. The relentless historical claims of Christianity have caught up with it along with the development of the speculative mind--reason. Thus we have applied an historical-critical method to our foundational documents--resulting for liberal theologians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in a rejection of the mythical language of the Bible as either archaic or largely meaningless for modern persons.

Yet, Biblical scholars soon discovered how unsatisfactory it is simply to strip the myth away from the "real content" of the Bible. For better or for worse, the form of the message is inextricably interwoven with the message. We must thoroughly understand the myth, not reject it out

of hand, in order to understand the content. This move to accurately discern form and content and their relations may be traced especially in the study of parables, beginning with Adolf Jülicher's important work.² In his book, Jülicher made a distinction between the parable and the allegory. He pointed out that whether a parable is a "similitude" (comparing two kinds of behavior, for example) or an "exemplary story" (a model of right conduct), it always seeks to make one simple point. Applying an allegorical interpretation violates the simple integrity of the parable, for it seeks to find concealed in the story a deeper meaning, while ignoring the point being scored. By carefully analyzing the parabolic form and identifying it with Jesus, Jülicher felt confident that the parables were the most authentic teachings of Jesus; while allegorizing could be identified with teachings of the early church.

This was an important development for Christology and indirectly for theology. Now it seemed possible to view Jesus in purely historical terms--not in mythological/allegorical terms. As James M. Robinson has said,

For Jülicher, the point of the parable was a rational principle, the more universal the better, and usually of a moral nature (since Jesus was envisaged by the Victorians as primarily a moralist).³

²Adolf Jülicher, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu (2. Aufl. Tübingen: Mohr, 1899).

³James M. Robinson, "Jesus Parables as God Happening," in Stoneburner, p. 46.

Yet, the works of Johannes Weiss (1892), and Albert Schweitzer (1901) called for "a reinterpretation of the overarching orientation of the parable's single point from moralism to eschatology. . . ." ⁴ In reaction to this, C. H. Dodd coined the phrase "realized eschatology" by which he meant to say that the Kingdom as Jesus understood it was here now, not near. But this does not seem fair to all of Jesus' teachings. So Ernst Haechen proposed the phrase "eschatology being realized" or "eschatology that is in the process of realization." Joachim Jeremias picked this up and cogently argued for it as a mediating position. ⁵

But, as James Robinson has observed,

This solution is satisfying only to the biblicist who is content to find in modern language a close approximation to what he thinks the biblical language meant, without asking further whether this modern language is intelligible, makes conceptual sense. But the questions of the contemporary theologian can be met only with embarrassed silence: Just how near? How in the future if already here? Which part here and which part near? How valid when the appointed time has passed? ⁶

Here we arrive at the most serious and far-reaching effort to reconcile myth and history--Rudolf Bultman's concept of demythologizing. Again, the issues crystallize around the person of Jesus, and his relation to the kingdom

⁴Ibid.

⁵Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus (2d ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963).

⁶Robinson, "Jesus Parables," p. 47.

of God/salvation understood historically-critically rather than mythologically. Bultmann was interested in a very restricted Christology which saw Jesus as the great and ultimate sign of God's reign. As such, Jesus simply confronts us through his preaching about God's reign to decide now to live an authentic life. Robert Funk points out that Bultmann was at pains to deal with a modern mind set which is thoroughly literalistic in its orientation--i.e., it will accept nothing that is not absolutely merely descriptive of "reality." Such a mind set could not accept the mythical notions of God becoming human and somehow through his death and resurrection effecting human salvation once and for all. Thus, he set aside the historical questions about the humanity/divinity of Jesus and the nagging puzzles of eschatological time ("Jesus ignores time."). Instead he emphasized a basic personal existential encounter between persons and the Word of God which Jesus proclaimed. Encounter with Jesus was important in terms of Jesus' Word (specifically, the parables) because this Word presents the reality of God's grace for the hearer's existence which will lead to life-risking trust in God's grace.

But Bultmann was not persuaded that myth was no longer "true"; he therefore sought, through demythologizing, to preserve the "truth" of the Christian myth, which he took to be the affirmation (confession), God and no other effects human's (my) salvation. Although he takes this affirmation as not empirically verifiable, and thus as descriptively non-literal, he refuses to acknowledge that the mode of the affirmation remains mythical: the subject of the sentence is God, and Christ

is retained as a hero of the mythical order. Such a confession, understood precisely in an existential sense, flies directly in the face of the common lived world. . . .⁷

The above quotation from Robert Funk, again indicates to me the modern Christian uncomfortableness with myth and leads to another development in biblical theology: the new hermeneutic. The new hermeneutic takes Bultmann's kerygmatic theology derived from (early) Heidegger and carries it a step further (derived from the later Heidegger). The "Word of God" which Bultmann refers to is the mythically problematic phrase. To demythologize it, we need not just an understanding of human existence, but an understanding of language. Even Bultmann's existentialistic interpretation of the New Testament is seen as too static, too apt to objectify an existential meaning. Language should not be understood as simply the expression of "one's own subjectivity (Schleiermacher-Dilthey) or understanding of existence (Bultmann)."⁸ Language is actually "called forth by being, by world. Such language itself becomes the most concrete manifestation of being or world, in which sense Heidegger says that what speaks is not so much humanity as language itself."⁹ In other words, "Word of God" must be understood as "Word from God." As such, we are

⁷Robert Funk, "Myth and the Literal Non-Literal," in Stoneburner, p. 63.

⁸Robinson, "Jesus Parables," p. 48. ⁹Ibid.

concerned here not with a mythical "saving event," but a concrete "language event" (Fuchs) or "word event" (Ebeling (Ebeling)).¹⁰ "For the Christian message has to do with a particularly acute instance of the convergence of factuality and meaningfulness . . ."¹¹ which

. . . has the power to transform the lived context of historic being-there-in-the-world--transform it, that is, by clearing away whatever obscures the really real. It is literally "world" creating word. Such a word cannot be raked up from just anywhere; it must erupt like a volcano from the heart of the heat of our history, lay an old world to waste, and cool and crystallize in the chilly drafts of criticism as the threshold of a new world.¹²

The new hermeneutic sees the parables of Jesus as particularly well suited for generating just this sort of word event. In parable, the usual dichotomy between act and word is overcome to produce meaningful happening, calling forth further happenings. Parables connect with everyday world, thus drawing the listener into relationship, yet subverts or distorts that everyday world in favor of a new view of reality. The new hermeneutic maintains that parables are paradigms of "true language" (thus avoiding the pure relativism of a reality caught up in an infinite web of possible meanings). Instead of evaluating authentic existence in terms of one's being, evaluation is in terms of

¹⁰Cf. James M. Robinson, The New Hermeneutic (New Frontiers in Theology, 2; New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

¹¹Robinson, "Jesus Parables," p. 49.

¹²Funk, p. 63.

the language

called forth to reach understanding and agreement, in itself the medium of rapport and mutual participation, hence in its true nature as manifested in the parables the language of love. On this basis true language is the proper being of reality; that is to say, true language is the way in which reality should be. Ultimately reality is admitted into its truth by the language of love. . . . It is this language event which is both the saving event and God's word--God's happening and God happening.¹³

What we have here is the latest in what I deem to be a series of attempts to too thoroughly emphasize history at the expense of myth. I do not wish to deny the historical-critical heritage of liberal Protestant Christianity. But I believe it must be reconciled in some form of harmonious balance with myth. For the way in which language is the possible which grants reality truth--the truth of God and of Love--and how that event has saving character seems to put us again in the face of myth: the mystery of life, the ultimate, the unnameable. Too much historical-critical rigor robs our faith of its dynamic assertions regarding the power of God. Is it not God who acts to transform rather than the "Word" or "language" of Love? And doesn't our faith assert that such action has taken and is taking place in and through Jesus Christ? Doesn't this same Jesus have some efficacious power to affect our lives himself, now? It seems to me that it is not only Jesus' language, but Jesus' person in which God's reign happens as

¹³ Robinson, "Jesus Parables," p. 50.

reality's true possibility. I agree that in the parables we find a unique and powerful union of act and word, form and matter. But I also believe that in the life of Jesus we encounter God--a God not confined to language event but manifest in every event. It is this God who is available to us prior to any language forms, be they preconceptual and pictorial or complex and abstract.

I also have great reservations about the ability of the new hermeneutic to distinguish between God's activity and human activity. Based as it is on an existential approach, the new hermeneutic tends to see the language event as contingent upon the human response. But Christians have traditionally believed that God may act in spite of human sinfulness--that in fact we need God's strengthening in order to adequately respond. Human sinfulness is a reality from which only God can save us. Though the phrases "language event" or "word event" may be good concepts for helping us understand conversion and repentance, I do not think they are sufficient for understanding the whole of Christian life. First, not every event is a language event. Second, the gospel demands daily obedience. Such ongoing obedience must be practiced with discipline--a discipline that acknowledges God's story as different from my story or even my response to God's story. God's story transcends and transforms my story, if I consistently allow it, but is independent of me. How I

align myself to this story of God's is what this project is ultimately all about.

Methodology

What I will seek to do in this project is to develop a theology which acknowledges the activity of God specifically and uniquely in Jesus Christ as well as in all creation. I will then demonstrate how the recognition of the dimensions of life-in-a-story can put us in touch with that activity.

In chapter one I identify some epistemological and metaphysical foundations for human existence which allow for the development of a theology intelligible to contemporary people. Congruencies between those foundations and the narrative quality of human existence are explored in chapter two. Some observations are made and conclusions drawn regarding human experience and revelation at the end of this chapter. In the third chapter I make some assertions toward an understanding of Christian spirituality, also linking spirituality to the narrative quality of human existence. I then proceed, in chapter four, to establish the value of disciplines for Christian spirituality and determine how storytelling can be a valuable spiritual discipline. This chapter includes specific exercises for individuals and small groups. Finally, in the fifth chapter, I discuss the relevance of story/storytelling for the local parish in

terms of some sociological ramifications of story/story-telling. I also develop a "storytelling praxis" to further explicate the applicability and practicability of a story-telling spiritual discipline for a local parish struggling to enact God's will in a world of change, pain, and injustice.

Chapter 1

FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

We do not start from projecting modes of our consciousness or analogies of our own activities, onto a world beyond us. We start from consciousness of ourselves as arising out of rapport, interconnection and participation in processes reaching beyond ourselves. Such feeling is a precondition of self conscious experience.

Dorothy Emmet¹

I suggest that the development of systemic theology should be accompanied by a critical understanding of the relation of linguistic expression to our deeper and most persistent intuitions. Language was developed in response to the excitement of practical actions. It is concerned with the prominent facts. . . . But the prominent facts are the superficial facts. They vary because they are superficial, and they enter into conscious discrimination because they vary. There are other elements in our experience, on the fringe of consciousness, and yet massively qualifying our experience.

Alfred North Whitehead²

Modes of Perception: Epistemology

Another way to understand the conflict within Christianity between myth and history pointed out in the Introduction begins with the question, "What is real?" As Paul Tillich³ points out, Christians have always had a

¹Dorothy Emmet, The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking (London: Macmillan, 1945).

²Alfred North Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas (New York: Free Press, 1967).

³Paul Tillich, The Protestant Era (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

tremendous concern for realism (i.e., history) as opposed to myth or the purely subjective. Seldom, however, has this concern pressed beyond the historical or even empirical data. In order to reach the really real, said Tillich, we must seek the unconditional ground of everything real--that is, something other than or beyond the human world.

But from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries until the 1920s and 1930s, Christian concern for realism has actually been founded upon the idealism of the Enlightenment in either of two forms: either a form of moral idealism in which "self-experience" is made the normative base for knowledgeable action, or in a form of conceptualism or conceptual theism. In either case, the logic of the positions leads to humanism, a confidence that human beings can know reality. Christians received support for this confidence in the growing reliance of secular society on science. The easy formula for this epistemology was observation plus experimentation equals correct conceptualization of reality in language.

"But something went awry in the grand strategy. Nature, though malleable, proved much more mysterious than the Newtonians, cum Comtians, imagined. . . ." ⁴ Thanks to the sciences of psychology, of the sociology of knowledge, and the contemporary historians of the physical sciences,

⁴James B. Wiggins (ed.) Religion as Story (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 4.

we are now confronted with the certainty that all our experiences of reality are filtered through interpretive schema. Reality and modes of expressing reality are seen to have affinities or be related, but not coalescing. A new realism born of the crises of the twentieth century and the startling discoveries in modern physics recognize "the structural limitations of the human organism, including that of mind and feeling, and a correspondingly new awareness of the complexity of the vast realm of reality in which our lives are cast."⁵

As Ian Ramsey has said, we have moved from a "picture models" mentality--in which it was assumed that through scientific inquiry we could construct an accurate picture model of the world--to a "disclosure model" mentality--in which intermittent discoveries through scientific method and experimentation can give insight into aspects of reality. But to proceed to total cosmologies from there is an act of faith, not a proven fact.

A shift in consciousness from picture model to disclosure model allows for a much more radical empiricism like that of William James or A. N. Whitehead. For now we may take much more seriously what we formerly ignored in the full range of human experience if it was not tangible or observable. As Bernard Meland puts it,

⁵Bernard Meland, Fallible Forms and Symbols (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 25.

Our language is rarely of a depth to apprehend, least of all to comprehend, the realities of which our lives are made, and within whose context they exist. Yet when we speak, we speak out of a depth of existing; and to a degree, in terms of it. And that may be the best we can hope for. But awareness of that, sheer appreciative awareness of that depth of our existing, is a gain in stature as a human being, and possibly in communicating as a human being.⁶

Reality, now tremendously expanded beyond what human beings can observe, let alone grasp, may appear to be out of reach. Yet this is where we refocus on human experience from a more humble perspective. For,

. . . reality is in the immediacies of . . . lived experiences which are of a piece with and participate in dimensions of ultimacy. . . . Language may illuminate and significantly inform our participation in this depth of reality which exceeds, or may even elude, our forms and symbols; yet its formulations in words or doctrines, in myths or metaphysics, are not to be made coterminous, in the sense of "picture models," with this reality as lived; or with the realities of faith as experienced. Yet they may serve as disclosures . . . of what is real and reassuring in these experiences as lived.⁷

We may most accurately describe the epistemological task, then, as the constructing of believable models.

Implicit in every doing is a model of what one is doing--of what one is going to discover or know as a result. This appears to conform to the classic model of science: hypothesis, experiment, validation. It differs from the classical view of science because it claims that all you have at the end is an hypothesis that works, not reality itself.⁸

Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith suggest

⁶Ibid.p. 30.

⁷Ibid., p. 31.

⁸Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith, "Modeling in Religious Education," Religious Education LXXI (March-April 1976), 118.

that aesthetic criteria are the most appropriate norms for evaluating models for adequacy in disclosing what is real.

A quality is aesthetic when it converts brute existence into meaningful relationships that yield consummatory experience. A model may be considered to have aesthetic quality when the constitutive elements acquire an enhanced existence because of their participation in the whole. . . . Furthermore, the most significant models will be characterized by the unpredictable, the spontaneous, the not yet formulable and the ineffable. Paradoxically, while embodying an interpretation of experience that calls forth awe--even contemplation--the truly significant model will also be instrumental.⁹

Durka and Smith enumerate five aesthetic criteria for evaluating life-defining or significant models:

- a. The most profound models incorporate contradictions; they do not impose boundaries.¹⁰
- b. The best models not only permit change, they promote development.¹¹
- c. A model derives its validity from its capacity to interpret experience in a way that extends the coherence of our existence.¹²
- d. The best models will suggest even more than they can resolve.¹³
- e. A final personal test of a model is its effectiveness in our personal lives.¹⁴

⁹Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith, Modeling God (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 17.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 61. ¹¹Ibid., p. 62. ¹²Ibid., p. 63.

¹³Ibid., p. 65. ¹⁴Ibid., p. 71.

Metaphysical Principles

In light of the discussion regarding our human experience of reality, it is apparent that we need a model that will help us understand our relation to the mystery of existence. Such a model, I believe, may be found in process thought based on the works of such seminal thinkers as William James, A. N. Whitehead, and Charles Hartshorne. Let us begin with the problem of how we may intelligibly speak of the "depth of reality" or "mystery of existence" in which we participate, but which we may only inadequately conceptualize. Here we investigate what James could have meant when he asserted that perceptual experience is a richer event than conception can possibly be.

Don Browning has approached the problem by asserting that experience includes both an adverbial perceptual mode and an accusative perceptual mode; that is, both the process of feeling or experiencing data and the process of ordering these data. In the adverbial perceptual mode, experience is rich and full--the response of the total organism to the whole environment. "At the adverbial level of perception the continuity of functions between us and the world is felt as patterned qualities."¹⁵ It is our

¹⁵Don Browning, "Psychological and Ontological Perspectives on Faith and Reason," Journal of Religion, XLV (October 1965), 297

response to those patterned processes and thus has some identity or correspondence with them, though not in an unambiguously reproductive way.

This is the level at which we "feel" or, as Whitehead said, "prehend" something or other. This feeling or prehension is augmented by my senses. "Prehension" describes "the general way in which the occasion of experience can include, as part of its own essence, any other occasion of experience or an entity of another type."¹⁶ Since each occasion is linked to those that have come before it, we "feel" a basic continuity with the whole of our environment. In fact, prehension is the beginning of the process of becoming a whole, concrete, individual, and unique event.

Process thought intrudes into the discussion of every emerging selfhood (every concrete occasion) a vast fund of relata, which each individual prehends with varying degrees of relevance even as it bodies forth within its own concretion its distinctive and unique emergence. In a new occasion (i.e., any concrete event from atomic reactions to human experiences) the many become and are increased by one in a creative synthesis which is ultimately not predetermined though it is thoroughly resourced. Each new born occasion carries its heritage within itself, yet

¹⁶Whitehead, p. 284.

is a unique and new creation by virtue of its response to and integration of that heritage. This "heritage" or antecedent datum of a new occasion is itself composed of occasions which have completed their self-formation and perished in their hot living immediacy. This process forever forms the basis for the birth of future occasions. Concrescence or the becoming actual, then,

is viewed as interlacing the primary thrust of creativity with a vast array of attending and relevant relationships. "We are made for ourselves, for others, and for God" is one way of focusing this communal dimension of every concretion.¹⁷

Depth in this sense [of the adverbial mode of perception] then, is contextual, relational, and simultaneously so in a spatial and a temporal sense. The relational or contextual ground of all existence is dynamic, ongoing.¹⁸

We sense the "mystery of existing" (Meland) in the "adverbial perceptual mode" (Browning) in more than just the evocative sense of wonderment or apprehension. For we feel or prehend the dimensional character that each concrete occurrence enjoys which is deeper than consciousness and deeper than anyone's sensory awareness of it. It is a complex of feelings and valuations.

Thus, "each event . . . appears to be held in existence through a structure of relationships that is integral to its own act of existing and to circumstances creative and supportive of its existing."¹⁹ Yet each event is more

¹⁷Meland, p. 55. ¹⁸Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 45.

than the nexus of relationships which make up the history of natural structures with their interactions, actions, reactions and responses to the context of their existence.

That "more" is

the ever-present interplay of creativity, sensitivity, and negotiability that gives dynamic possibilities to each nexus of relationships, imparting to each event a creative intent, enabling it to live forward and to participate in the élan of existing.²⁰

Simple lived experience in this primary adverbial mode of perception

is simultaneously a patterned occurrence exemplifying and bodying forth the stream of ever recurring concretions as a communal event and an intensified channeling of that stream into individuated life-spans, each with its legacy of inherited possibilities as an emerging event.²¹

Out of the myriad of past occasions, each new occasion creates itself or becomes decisively concrete in that moment of culminating unity. It "enjoys" actuality or concrecence and in that moment has passed from the objectivity of the data to the subjectivity of the fully developed occasion. Thus, all reality is composed of subjects--momentary actual occasions of being which in that moment of self-completion stand alone as an emotional unity of enjoyment existing in and for itself. Yet, it is a fruit of the past, and as such it embodies subjective forms belonging to its antecedent world. And it is fodder for the future and

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., p. 56.

as such has a kind of future prescience--a living toward the embodiment of its own subjective form in new occasions. Reality is thus a thoroughly social process--becoming/being are impossible outside a context.

We attend to this lived experience of the depth of existence in the adverbial mode of perception. This is the mode prior to the accusative mode of perception wherein we analyze our lived experience, abstracting and differentiating our experience in certain simplified symbolic forms with which we build conceptual models. The adverbial mode of perception may be referred to as faith.

Faith is 1) a total valuational response resulting from 2) a partial conformation of our feelings to the pattern of feelings or qualities of another actuality 3) with which we are in some way internally related or participatively connected.²²

Faith is first that intuitive response of an organism to the qualitative essence of the whole. Secondly, faith encounters something which transcends it because it is both "in" our experience and yet not our experience. That is, we may say that I as experiencing subject, am dependent on the world (an "object" which is itself composed of subjects) for my experience, while it is independent of me for its existence (it is real in its own right). Here, idealism and panpsychism combine creatively with realism. Thirdly, faith is relational. There is a

²²Browning, p. 301.

fundamental continuity, a condition of rapport, between ourselves and our environment or context. Finally, "Faith when understood in its specifically religious context, refers to that total valuational response of trusting gratitude to our most fundamentally all embracing relationship called God."²³ Faith, then, "is the fundamental category of personal existence."²⁴

This is a crucial point. For it indicates that faith precedes and forms the basis for reason and knowledge. It is in the receptive or conformal stage of each concrescing occasion that we are most fundamentally and immediately aware of the totality of the universe and God. This precedes language and consciousness, though we may call it a way of "knowing." We will want to more specifically delineate some forms of this faith from a Christian perspective in the following chapters.

Reflections on an Integration of Epistemology and Metaphysics

Faith is not an anti-intellectual or antirational stance. The many endeavors of the accusative mode of perception to make sense out of the adverbial mode of perception have their place and value.

²³Ibid., p. 303.

²⁴Durka and Smith, "Modeling in Religious Education," p. 119.

Theology, when it is adequately exercised, is a contrapuntal mode of inquiry in which themes distilled as motifs of faith from the living structure of experience are in concourse with analogical notions provided by conceptual visions of thought. In this understanding of existence and inquiry, we are made attentive not just to a reasonable explication of things, but to the surprises, the intimations of wonder and novelty in these lived experiences; yes, and to the judgments upon our limited responses, or overt acts of evil and folly when we act wrongly, insensitively, even destructively.²⁵

Reason is most closely associated with the accusative mode of abstractive, discriminating and simplifying functions. Reasoning is the process of verification, i.e., discovering whether a particular symbolic form abstracted in the accusative mode is adequately descriptive of the event to which it refers. "Adequately descriptive" is defined both by internal coherence and external coherence. Human beings have always been engaged in the process of developing models for understanding, and communicating about, reality. We are calling for the application of a rigorous critical inquiry in a dialectical process. Not only must we apply reason to faith or piety, we must evaluate reason in the light of faith--i.e., our best sense of reality. ". . . the creatural stance, that is, the stance oriented toward the depth of the lived experience, is to be reckoned potentially more profound and discerning than that of the technical, critical, intellectual one."²⁶

Two themes which have been implicit in our

²⁵Meland, p. 32.

²⁶Ibid., p. 52.

epistemological and metaphysical discussions should now be made explicit: value and meaning. The most basic possible meaning of each event is the intrinsic value of becoming concrete (concrecence). As Barry Woodbridge has pointed out to me, there appears to be a universal proclivity or, at least, a human tendency "toward growth over fragmentation, relatedness over alienation, intensity over diffuseness, and novelty over stagnation." In our faith journeys and intellectual quests for adequate models, the basic criteria for evaluation will be aesthetic--the study of what makes experiences good in themselves. There are several variables which affect the degree of aesthetic value in experiences: harmony and intensity (or unity and diversity); complexity and simplicity (or profundity and superficiality). These, in fact, Hartshorne identifies as four poles of aesthetic value, between which may be discovered the ideally beautiful. God functions within these aesthetic structures or criteria to increase the probability that enjoyment (concrecence) will be enriched. The ideally beautiful for each new occasion is not predetermined from the past. The lure or attractive possibility in relation to which each new occasion becomes, is derived from God. Thus we are ultimately self-determining in that we choose or actualize ourselves from the myriad of stimuli.

So we have come round a circle to our criteria for

an adequate model. Our epistemological and metaphysical model:

- a. incorporates contradictions, e.g., we cannot exist outside a context, yet we create ourselves;
- b. permits change, promotes development, e.g., the depth of reality is dynamic and ongoing as its most basic characteristic--continually striving for novelty;
- c. extends the coherence of our existence, e.g., a rigorous empirical realism includes not only what we may conceptualize as coherent, but also what we may perceive on a preconscious level;
- d. suggests more than it resolves, e.g., we will want to further pursue some theological implications and the relationships of faith and traditional Christian understandings of spirituality;
- e. has effectiveness for our personal lives (this remains to be seen as we move toward the concluding chapters of this project).

Chapter 2

NARRATIVE THEOLOGY AND STORYTELLING--

A WAY TO MEANING

In this chapter we seek to show that narrative most closely, most accurately, and most creatively ties together the adverbial mode of perception and the accusative mode of perception. That is, through the medium of story we can best approach the depth of the mystery of our existence in a total valuational response of trusting gratitude.

Origins of Narrative

"A need to tell and hear stories is essential to the species Homo sapiens--second in necessity apparently after nourishment and before love and shelter."¹ Our own experience affirms that story is the "chief means by which we become, and stay, human"² Naturally, this must make us curious about the origins of narrative. When did humans develop language? Here we turn to both paleoanthropologists and linguists. The former group answers "When?" in terms of datable evidence regarding the origins of the human species. The latter group answers in terms of

¹Reynolds Price, A Palpable God (New York: Atheneum, 1978), p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 14.

speculation about how language developed. Theories include: divine gift; imitation of nonhuman sound; response to pain or intense feeling; natural accompaniment to common acts of labor; mystic correspondence between sound and sense; inevitable result of brain structure; etc.

Reynolds Price likes a statement by Otto Jespersen:

. . . the genesis of language is not to be sought in the prosaic, but in the poetic side of life, the source of speech is not gloomy seriousness, but merry play and youthful hilarity. And among the emotions which are most powerful in eliciting outbursts of music³ and of song, love must be placed in the front rank.

This sort of statement points us away from the "when?" or "how?" questions regarding narrative origins, to ask "why?" Though story and language are now solidly bound, perhaps they did not arise together. The need to narrate was perhaps crucial to the origin of language, indeed to narrate as distinct from to inform. We may observe that people tell themselves stories well before they possess speech or even substantial experience of the world--most particularly in the form of dreams (which all healthy babies have).

From our earliest moments of vitality we are impinged upon by prehensions (nonsensory precipitating

³Ibid., p. 4, citing Otto Jespersen, Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin (London: G. Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1922), p. 433.

images) and sensory impressions (sensory precipitating images). These feelings and impressions coupled with the selective and creative synthesis of the categories of understanding shape images which in turn shape us (as characters or persons in the world). At once we have created the wealth of ideas and the difficulty of sharing these ideas common to every human being.

Impressions come to us as related, that is, in a context or a matrix, and those relationships themselves give rise to new feelings and the sense impressions. We receive the basic impressions (the many) and unify them in our experience (the one) and so develop meaningful patterns according to our categories of understanding.

. . . all human experience combines the givenness of impressions that are thrust upon us with the ordered patterns we make of these impressions through the subjective understanding. . . . Through this exercise images are formulated, and words are the signs that point to these images. They are more or less effective as they lead the listener to the exact image of the speaker's mind.⁴

Here we may conclude that these formulations of images are already wholistic grasps on reality--they shape our self-understanding and our understanding of the world. Such images already have attached to them a dramatic flow--many things are taken in and unified. There is movement in this, a process much greater than detached taking

⁴Robert Roth, Story and Reality (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), p. 34.

in of sense impressions from which ideas are derived. Thus, all human beings understand themselves as participants in a story, not as data collecting and collating robots. It is only later, upon reflecting on our story that we analyze it into components of sense experience, feelings, ideas, etc.

Now we can discern a basic continuity between narrative and the fundamental reality or depth of existence which we sketched in chapter one. There is drama and "movement" in the concrescence or becoming of each event or occasion of experience which narrative can appropriately express. Further, each occasion arises out of a context, a matrix or matrices of relationships. Narrative grasps this in its very form or structure which consists of two aspects: listener and teller. "A great weight of evidence suggests that an understanding of story as transaction has been basic to the life of narrative as far back as we can see."⁵ As Price has put it, "Language is vehicle, almost never destination."⁶

Robert Roth proposes that instead of judging reality or meaning according to the "right" relationships between subjects and predicates (as we do in an Aristotelian manner of deductive thinking with its propositional structure, whether we are realists or nominalists), we ought

⁵Price, p. 16.

⁶Ibid., p. 6.

to discover meaning according to human relationships--relationships between persons and with God. Such relationships cannot depend on deductive reasoning about objective data, but instead are based on the measure of self-revealing between two living persons, that is, on transfers of meaning.

The one thing that all transfers of meaning have in common is the mutual experience of being involved in the story that brings meaning to light. Propositions with subjects and predicates enter into these stories in an ancillary way, but meaning arises from the experience of personal involvement in the dramatic action.⁷

We wish now to more precisely investigate meanings which narrative provides in human intercourse. Relationships will be our key category as we proceed.

First, narrative supports the literal survival of the species by providing us with numerous forms of nurture:

. . . the simple companionship of the narrative transaction, the union of teller and told; the narrator's opportunity for exercise of personal skill in telling and its ensuing rewards; the audience's exercise of attention, imagination, powers of deduction; the spiritual support which both parties receive from stories affirming our importance and protection in a perilous world; the transmission to younger listeners of vital knowledge, worldly and unworldly; the narcotic effect of narrative on pain and boredom; and, perhaps most importantly, the chance that in the very attempt at narrative transaction something new will surface or be revealed, some sudden floater from the dark unconscious, some message from a god which can only arrive or be told as a tale.⁸

Human needs for nurture must be a part of the pressure

⁷Roth, p. 42.

⁸Price, p. 26.

which leads eventually to speech and then to story--stories which lifted up, especially, the positive aspects of existence--order and meaningfulness--so that they might be adhered to and perpetuated in the form of a "story which illuminated present and future by reference to a past both warning and counseling."⁹ The ability to tell and/or understand such stories meant survival.

Another characteristic of narrative is its conceptual framework of sequential time. "What is a story? A story is a narrative that links sequences. A story is a structure for time. A story links actions over time. . . ."¹⁰ Such stories lead one to guess at cause, to push the question further and further back towards origins, causes, and the question, "Why?" We may undoubtedly find some of the earliest answers to "Why?" preserved in human mythologies. These mythologies almost always regress to creation of world and humans by gods--stories in which "something transcendent in beast, humans, and nature is implored and entreated with delight and reverence."¹¹

Sacred Story Vis-à-vis Mundane Story

We may easily discover via the study of traditional

⁹Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁰Michael Novak, Ascent of the Mountain, Flight of the Dove (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 49.

¹¹Price, p. 27.

folk cultures how powerful stories are for shaping consciousness. Stories may not even be told, simply reenacted. On that level we talk of "myth"--the story within the stories. Written expressions of these myths do not fully capture the meaning of story as powerfully formative of a civilization's sense of itself and its world.

Certainly these mythopoeic stories function quite differently in traditional cultures from the way conscious art does in what we are pleased to call higher cultures. They are anonymous and communal. None of our individualized conceptions of authorship are appropriate to them, and while rich powers of imagination may be expressed in them they are certainly not perceived as conscious fictions. Such stories, and the symbolic worlds they project, are not like monuments that people behold, but like dwelling places. People live in them. Yet even though they are not directly told, even though a culture seems rather to be the telling than the teller of these stories, their form seems to be narrative. They are moving forms . . . which inform people's sense of the story of which their own lives are a part, of the moving course of their own action and experience.¹²

Fundamental narrative forms may be called sacred stories, because the human sense of self and world is created through them. Only these stories have been found adequate to celebrate the "gods" or God upon which our existence depends. These stories orient us through time--our very personal/corporate experience and sense of style--to the great powers that establish the reality of our world.

¹²Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," Journal of the American Academy of Religion, XXXIX, 3 (September 1971), 295.

Stories that are told, stories directly seen or heard, may be called mundane stories. Such stories attempt to capture the sacred stories (though they never fully succeed) in words, scenes, roles, sequences of events within a plot, and other narrative devices. Mundane or profane stories are thus set within a world of consciousness and attempt to clarify and articulate our sense of the world. As our sense of the world changes, we think up new and different stories to tell so that we may cope.

Sacred stories may change, but not through conscious reflection,

. . . for the sacred story does not transpire in a conscious world. It forms the very consciousness that projects a total world horizon, and therefore informs the intentions by which actions are projected into that world. . . . One may attempt to name a sacred story. . . . But such naming misleads as much as it illuminates, since its meaning is contained--and concealed--in the unutterable cadences and revelations of the story itself. Yet every sacred story is creation story: not merely that one may name creation of world and self as its "theme," but also that the story itself creates a world of consciousness and the self that is oriented to it.¹³

There is distinction without separation between sacred and profane stories. The sacred, in fact, can only be thought of in terms of the profane. There is a dialectic relationship. Thus, sacred is not to be understood as delineating one class of things, while the profane defines another. "The world regarded remains the same.

¹³Ibid., p. 296.

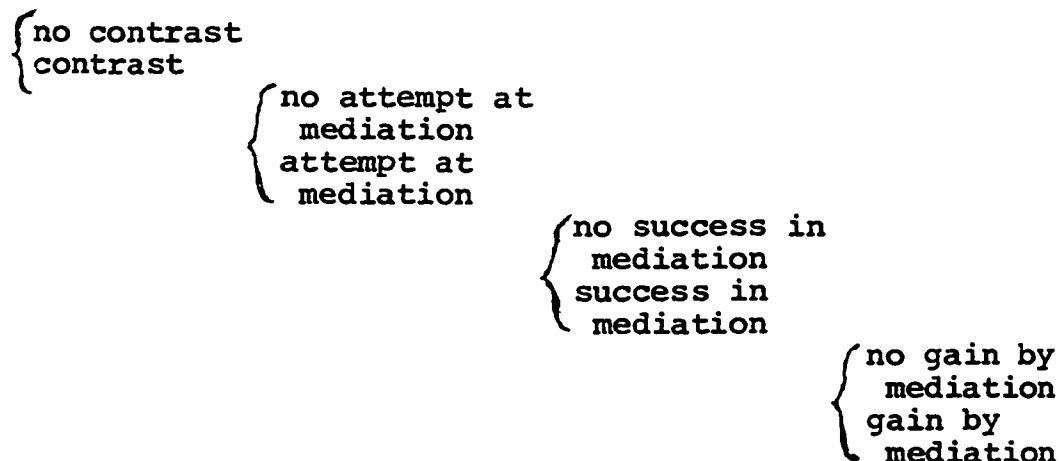
Only now one notices aspects one did not notice before, counts them important, pitches one's life in accordance with them. . . ."¹⁴

We may get in touch with sacred story most frequently when the stories we tell deal with profound dissonances, contrasts, paradoxes, or oppositions.

In a mythical story, an opposition between two terms that cannot be reconciled (binary opposition) will be represented by two fictional surrogates, and these replacements will allow a reconciliation or mediation which the original pair could not receive.¹⁵

Here again, we see that the structure of myth involves relations.

John Crossan diagrams the function of myth as follows:



To have a story one must choose the lower (positive) options. We see from the model or structure, that

¹⁴Novak, p. 33.

¹⁵John Dominic Crossan, The Dark Interval (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1975), p. 51.

whether mediation is successful or not, or even gainful or not, one is establishing in, by and through myth the conviction that mediation is possible. . . . It is much more important to believe in the possibility of solution than ever to find one in actuality. The gain or advantage of myth, and its basic function, is to establish that possibility itself.¹⁶

Often myths have a quest or journey theme, as a hero or heroine attempts to reconcile profound human dilemmas or experiences of tension and pain in contrasts. Such binary oppositions which all human beings experience include freedom and constraints or determinism; life and death; reality and illusion; change or growth and stagnation or deterioration; peace and conflict; good and evil; promise and prohibition; desire and contentment; meaning and absurdity; hope and despair. Myths are stories which deal with these sorts of themes and are thus world-view stories. They are obviously meaningful even though they do not fit into the categories of emotive verbal/logical or descriptive/factual.

The propositions of myth provide a fourth kind of statement, a statement marked by its credibility in the story by which a culture lives. Every culture, every age, has its world-view story by which it finds meaning in the mystery of life and the world. Credibility is the criterion of these statements, just as emotive statements are measured in terms of honesty, verbal statements are measured in terms of validity, and descriptive statements are measured in terms of facticity. Credibility means adequacy to meet the needs of a faith by which to live in the circumstances thrust upon a given age.¹⁷

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 53-54.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 55.

When we as individuals tell stories then, we participate in a thoroughly human process which nevertheless may put us in touch with the most fundamental processes of life. A story, as we have said, is at its best when it recounts not merely actions but struggles. Michael Novak asserts that

the key struggle of life is that of psychic transformation: of breakthroughs in the way one perceives events, imagines oneself, understands others, grasps the world, acts. A story, then, not only links actions, more profoundly, it links transformations.¹⁸

Transformations occur in whole, mature people, that is, people who have a developed sense of identity. We may develop this sense of identity first by ascertaining our own unique standpoint--that

complex of all things that compose an inquiring who. It is a complex of past experience, a range of sensibility, accumulated images and imaginative patterns, interests, bodies of insights already appropriated, purposes, structured and unstructured passions, criteria of evidence and relevance, the repertoire of already affirmed concrete judgements, values, goals, decisions.¹⁹

Telling one's own story leads to discernment of one's own standpoint. Such discernment means really becoming aware of the images that shape one's own consciousness, both as one chooses these images and is "chosen" or lured by them. It means undertaking a quest or search for God in time and memory, to discover which of life's ambiguities or binary oppositions are most crucial in one's

¹⁸Novak, p. 53.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 55.

own life, and resolving these ambiguities. Telling one's own story means trying to fathom the many senses of reality, the many stories, the many symbols that give sense and plausibility to one's actions. It means that "character" must be continually dynamic and changing. That is, moment by moment I create my own identity out of myriads of stimuli by unifying these stimuli as "my experience." We will further investigate different aspects of character or personality and how these may organize our experience in chapter three. Here we want to focus on the narrative quality of human experience.

Narrative Quality of Human Experience

Far from being a disconnected and thus totally new enterprise each moment, "my experience" is held together in what may be called my character by my memory, as well as projected along specific trajectories by anticipation. That is, my consciousness mediates between what we have called sacred story and mundane story. "For consciousness is moulded by the sacred story to which it awakens, and in turn it finds expression in the mundane stories that articulate its sense of reality."²⁰ In order to be such a mediator, consciousness has its own form, and the form of its activity--experiencing--is narrative.

²⁰Crites, p. 297.

Conscious experiencing anticipates, attends, remembers. The interweaving and interplay of these three activities constitutes human character. Memory bridges the gap between each momentary occasion of conscious experience. In memory we have preserved, more or less accurately and more or less completely, all the inner impressions of feeling and mood, all the former experiences of one conscious life. Such experiences are preserved in a sequence--a before/after succession in order. Remembering is not knowledge in the conceptual sense; such knowledge results from the more subtle activity of recollection. Recollection has a style--is an art--as is storytelling an art and a recollection process. Thus, storytelling though manipulative of memories (i.e., a recollective process of gathering bits and pieces of images stored in memory into new configurations, thus reordering past experience) is not merely arbitrary in its form. For it adheres to some extent to the simpler form of memory (remembering or recalling)--the image stream which flows in sequence.

As I seek to understand my experience, then, I can recollect particular aspects of my past lodged in my memory. The most direct and obvious way to recollect, is to tell a story. The story is never merely the recital of the chronicle of memory itself, for then it would indicate no meaning. The autobiographical story I tell need not necessarily be verbal. I also recount my experience in

actions--habits and rituals which I perform regularly without even consciously being aware of them. Such actions form the textured patterns of my character inasmuch as I am consistent. Consistency is possible because of the original chronicle or image stream which is always at hand, needing only to be recalled.

Recollection takes place in the immediacy of present occasion and brings the decisive distinction between past, present and future which the chronicle of memory, with its simple temporality of succession, duration, before/after, does not have. This is where language assumes its tenses. Thus we have basically three tensed modalities which correlate with one another in every moment of experience: the present of things past (memory); the present of things present (direct attention) and the present of things future (anticipation) (Augustine). These together determine the inner form of any possible conscious experience.

The tensed unity of these modalities requires narrative forms both for its expression (mundane stories) and for its own sense of meaning of its internal coherence (sacred stories). For this tensed unity has already an incipient narrative form.²¹

Thus, the chronicle of memory, with its simple successiveness, is always taken up in actual experience into the more sophisticated temporality of tense. The same

²¹Ibid., pp. 301-302.

is true for anticipation which also manifests a very elemental narrative form. We project scenarios or stories about what might happen, could happen, will happen. These stories are not separate from the chronicle of memory, but are unified and distinguished in each present occasion of experience through time.

How can the determinate past meet the indeterminate future in some sort of creative synthesis? It can do so because the whole experience as it is concentrated in a conscious present has a narrative form. This occurs in the action of the third modality of conscious experience: the present of things present--direct attention.

The conscious present is that of a body impacted in a world and moving, in process, in that world. In this present, action and experience meet. Memory is its depth, the depth of experience in particular. The present of things present is its full bodily reality.²²

This is the moment of decision or concrescence in the story as a whole. Such decision making gives the story a dramatic character, joining as it does action and experience to create personal style or character. Human identity is thus never completely static, never completely uncreative, never merely a progression of compressed, nondurational, abstracted products. Instead, human character vibrates with vitality and drama and thus resonates with all reality in its narrative characteristics. And we may

²²Ibid., p. 303.

properly speak of identity or character as a linking of transformations. For, in each moment, the past has grown, the future has changed, and the new synthesis of the two is different. We may see from this view of personality that radical conversion is possible in human identity as the past and/or future grows or changes and is somehow unified in each present moment of experience.

In telling my own story, I am embarking on a journey of expanding consciousness par excellence. Very soon I find myself on the road of continual self-transcendence. For I discover that I do not only experience my own unique memories and anticipations, but those of my culture and social institutions as well. I may begin to see my inner life linked to all members of my society because of common cultural/social memories (traditions, history, heritage) and anticipations (goals, visions). The content and forms of experience are mediated by symbolic systems so that communication between persons as well as self-reflection is possible. This is where we formulate and tell the mundane stories that order our existence in a vast and confusing (or at least mysterious) universe.

So the narrative quality of experience has three dimensions. First, there is sacred story--the mysterious depth of existence which we only prehend at the adverbial mode of perception. Then there is mundane story--the dimension of our lives in which we generally live, as conscious

beings. Here is where we experience ourselves as impacted by a vast array of stimuli from which we must select as varyingly relevant those elements with which we will build a coherent world.

Thirdly, there is the temporal form of personal experience itself--the dimension wherein a mediation is effected between sacred story and mundane story to form the basis (intentions) for personal action. Sometimes these dimensions intersect, and in a luminous moment, sacred, mundane, and personal are inseparably conjoined. This gives rise to very special symbols--symbols created when sacred story dramatically intersects both an explicit narrative and the course of an individual's personal experience.

"Narrative form, and not the symbol as such, is primitive in experience. But narrative form is by no means innocent. It acknowledges and informs only what is contained in its own ordering of events."²³ Stories form the boundaries of our lives. We are bounded on the one hand by the "once upon a time" character of its beginning (i.e., this "once" is when time began for this story) and on the other hand by the "happily ever after" which points to no time again, and thus an end to the story because it is an end to temporality. The story is itself temporal,

²³Ibid., p. 306.

but framed in a nontemporal sort of beyond. Thus, it is a story, recognizable and specific. It exists for itself, and though it may point beyond itself, it does so from within the contingencies of experience described in and by the story.

Transcending the Myth

Recognizing one's own boundaries inside a story leads to a lack of pretentiousness, to honesty first about oneself along with acceptance of self as is, imperfect and thus not the center of the universe, or even one's own universe. Such realization may start one on the second stage of the journey of self-transcendence, away from self. This is the journey of the religious seeker, who now is not after his/her own fulfillment, but seeks simply and humorously to see the self in true relationship to others, profoundly respecting and reverencing all others. "The religious conscience is an attempt to be responsive: to take one's eyes off oneself, to attend to others and to the concrete world with reverent discernment."²⁴

There seems to be no escaping historical relativism. Thus, we need a confessional theology which is neither defensive or offensive, but is concerned with self-criticism and self-knowledge. H. R. Niebuhr affirms that,

²⁴Novak, p. 83.

Relativism does not imply subjectivism and asceticism. It is not evident that the one who is forced to confess that her view of things is conditioned by the standpoint she occupies must then doubt the reality she sees. It is not apparent that one who knows that his concepts are not universal must also doubt that there are concepts of the universal. . . .²⁵

We must not be ashamed on the one hand of our particular standpoint and thus attempt to attain no standpoint. We must recognize that thought about the sacred--about God--begins with and in an historical community as an inquiry into the nature of the object of faith; i.e., that upon which we most deeply rely for our existence and vitality. We must begin, in fact, in a particular faith, otherwise we will never feel any motivation to begin the quest for the sacred, for we will have had no particular faith experience. On the other hand, we cannot be self-defensive or self-justifying, for our faith journey is not towards self-knowledge or self-justification, but toward one in whom we live, move and have our being.

The confessional method is best suited to our faith if it is to be a dynamic, living present faith, and not something we either privately or institutionally possess, once and for all. Otherwise, there is no room for judgment by God, nor creativity by us in response to God in God's novel creativeness. Confession points out our nakedness before God, our sinfulness.

²⁵H. R. Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 18-19.

Such vulnerability opens us to a continual transcendence of our own finite standpoints and, again, this is best illustrated with another narrative form: the parable. If myth is the reconciliation of binary opposites, then, we may see parable as the polar or binary opposite of myth--creating irreconciliation where there was reconciliation. John Crossan diagrams it like this:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{no contrast} \\ \text{contrast} \end{array} \right\} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{contrast not created} \\ \text{contrast created} \end{array} \right.$$

(etc., as before)

Again, there is binary opposition: "contrast not created/contrast created." Again, the lower option must be chosen in order to have a story, in this case a parable. But to stay in parable, one must stop right there or risk slipping into myth.

Myth has a double function: the reconciliation of an individual contradiction and, more important, the creation of belief in the permanent possibility of reconciliation. Parable also has a double function which opposes the double function of myth. The surface function of parable is to create contradiction within a given situation of complacent security but, even more unnervingly, to challenge the fundamental principle of reconciliation by making us aware of the fact that we made up the reconciliation. Reconciliation is no more fundamental a principle than irreconciliation.²⁶

Parable is not antimyth. It is instead a story which points out the limits of myth.

²⁶Crossan, pp. 56-57.

Parables give God room. The parables of Jesus are not historical allegories telling us how God acts with humankind; neither are they moral example-stories telling us how to act before God and towards one another. They are stories which shatter the deep structure of our accepted world and thereby render clear and evident to us the relativity of story itself. They remove our defenses and make us vulnerable to God.²⁷

In such moments we become open to revelation--i.e., to indicators or indications of ultimate meaning. In the act of listening to and being caught up in parable, we may be both self-critical and self-consciously Christian. We will understand such revelation as providing meaning within a specific context (in our case, a Christian community) and not itself as history.

What the unconquerable movements of the human heart toward worship and devotion really mean, how their errors may be distinguished from their truths, and how they are to be checked cannot be known save as they are experienced and disciplined in a community with a history.²⁸

Communal events are the firmest basis of faith.

It is the nature of human beings to live for something--to live as though life had meaning, and that this meaning has definite reference to objective reality. That which gives meaning to modern lives may be so multifarious as to be chaotic, but inner history and inner faith belong together, i.e., how I experience the world and how I constitute myself in response to it are dependent upon one another in the creation or constant becoming of my self.

²⁷Ibid., p. 122.

²⁸Niebuhr, p. 53.

"Faith" equals belief in the meaningfulness of some God or value toward which I direct myself of necessity because I am a self. Experience underlies this faith but is not a substitute for it. Experience helps shape and is itself shaped by faith--that is, inner history is shaped by and shapes faith.

Observed externally by a spectator, one's external history will manifest or express one's inner history, but will not reveal why one finds meaning in this or that precise way. For a spectator does not participate in one's lived history. Niebuhr maintains that one's internal history cannot be linked either metaphysically or metahistorically with external history. Instead, the relation will be a practical one, described in terms of their functional relationship for us. Christians have typically found a functional relationship in at least two ways. One way wrestles with external views of ourselves and assigns spiritual significance to external history. Another way is to see God working in all history. Though we have a peculiar history, it impels us to seek God in other histories. This is not done to exalt inner faith and history, but simply to seek the ways of God. "The church's external history of itself may be described as an effort to see itself with the eyes of God."²⁹ Of course, it can never

²⁹Ibid., p. 88.

fully do so, but it can and should attempt it, both to know God and to be known of God, and so know more truly the self.

With this enterprise we may agree, though we take issue with Niebuhr's assertion that internal history cannot be linked either metaphysically or metahistorically with external history. If God works in all history, there must be a real continuity between internal history and external history. Indeed, our discussion in chapter one was at pains to delineate the relationship between my self, my experience, my history, and all of reality as being a metaphysically cohesive relationship. We will focus on this problem again in a discussion regarding the Christ of faith vis-à-vis the Christ of history in chapter three. There we will once again assert the metahistorical link between faith and history.

As we indicated above, revelation is to be found in the sphere of internal history, the story of what happened to us in a living community. It is thus not surprising that revelation will be concerned with the basic narrative forms of our experience. For though we have discussed the narrative quality of experience, we have not adequately examined its ultimate meaningfulness. Though there is basic value in the becoming and creative synthesis of each moment of experience, this does not guarantee satisfying meaning. Here we wish to assert with Niebuhr that through revelation "a pattern of dramatic unity

becomes apparent with the aid of which the heart can understand what has happened, is happening, and will happen to selves in their community."³⁰ Revelation is the functional key with which the link between internal history and external history may be understood and interpreted.

The revelatory moment makes the past intelligible.

"It is the ability of the revelation to save all the past from senselessness that is one of the marks of its revelatory character."³¹ Revelation calls and enables us to understand the past while driving us to remember what we had forgotten or ignored or repressed. "The revelatory event resurrects this buried past. It demands and permits that we bring into the light of attention our betrayals and denials, our follies and sins."³² Revelation also allows us to appropriate the past in two ways--for the community of revelation it is something all remember as having happened in their common past; it becomes an occasion for appropriating as their past, the past of all humanity.

This is not an intellectual exercise, but a moral event presided over by the heart of the participating self as the self engages in the interpretation and apprehension and rationalization of the past. This process may be called the conversion of the memory, and it provides meaning in

³⁰Ibid., p. 110.

³¹Ibid., p. 113.

³²Ibid., p. 114.

knowing we are part of an enduring inheritance which lives on in us in the present; in understanding oneself; in achieving unity of self and community with humankind. Such conversion is, of course, never once-and-for-all. "The conversion of the past must be continuous because the problems of reconciliation arise in every present."³³

Though revelation itself does not accomplish the conversion, it provides a revelatory image by which the reasoning heart may intelligibly search out memory.

The revelatory moment illumines the present. This is the realm of action and deeds, yet we realize how in all our actions we cannot begin to know how best to act, or what the consequences of our actions may be. The inadequacy of the images we usually employ to understand the whole of things

becomes apparent when we bring to bear upon our actions the larger image given us in revelation. Through the cross of Christ we gain a new understanding of the present scene, we note relations previously ignored; find explanations of our actions hitherto undreamed of. Deeds and sufferings begin to compose themselves into a total picture of significant action in which the self no longer occupies the center.³⁴

In interpreting our present, the life and death of Christ is our all pervasive, all encompassing paradigm. In that paradigm we discern, however vaguely, however ambivalently, the evidence of a pattern in which by great travail

³³Ibid., p. 118.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 123-124.

of humans and God, a work of redemption goes on. The revelatory moment becomes our rational image. We constantly risk abstracting from the historic moments to general concepts which may become manifest because of that moment, but are independent of it. So we speak of "reconciliation" or "the forgiveness of sins" or "the principle of obedience." But theology really must speak a more specific word than these speak if the functional/practical character of revelation is not to be undercut: a word about a unique obedience, a unique sacrifice, a unique sonship. That is why our theology must be confessional or narrative--for it must ultimately be a story of Christ's redemptive work in me as I struggle with obedience, with sacrifice, with what to do to fulfill God's will as a child of God. We will explore this further in chapter three.

The revelatory moment points and lures us toward a future. "We reason in our hearts in order that we may know the whither as well as the whence and where of our personal lives. If the past in inner history is what we are and the present what we do, our future is our potentiality."³⁵ In discerning past and present, we perceive the beginning of an end. In the Christian community we discern a possibility not implicit in us, but possible to the person revealed to us in Jesus Christ--the possibility of the

³⁵Ibid., p. 130.

resurrection of a new and other self, of a new community, a reborn remnant. Our natural proclivity of anticipation or living forward is given precise shape and vision as we find ourselves looking down the road Jesus looked down toward the kingdom of God. This is the eschatological aspect of revelation.

Attention to the revelatory moment sets in motion a progressive process whereby revelation interprets every occasion in the life of a people (the church) and thereby becomes validated.

The more apparent it becomes that the past can be understood, recovered and integrated by means of a reasoning starting with revelation, the more contemporary experience is enlightened and response to new situations aptly guided by this imagination of the heart, the more a prophecy based on this truth is fulfilled, the surer our conviction of its reality becomes.³⁶

For Christians, the revelatory moment, "the great image of the saving work of God" is forever found in Jesus Christ. The progressive process of interpretation does not mean we can ever

substitute for the revelatory moment of Jesus Christ some other moment in our history and interpret the latter through the former. . . . Nevertheless, revelation is a moving thing in so far as its meaning is realized only by being brought to bear upon the interpretation and reconstruction of ever new human situations in an enduring movement, a single drama of divine and human action. So the God who revealed God's self continues to reveal God's self--the one God of all times and places.³⁷

³⁶Ibid., p. 132.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 135-136.

We may speak of the progressive nature of revelation in a slightly different sense, also. Just as in conceptual knowledge we engage in a dialectic between reason and experience and back to reason, so that our concepts are enriched, clarified and corrected while our experience is illuminated and directed, so in the reason of the heart we engage in a dialectic between the revelatory moment and present experience (in all its multidimensional fullness) and back to revelation. "In that process the meaning of revelation, its richness and power, grow progressively clearer."³⁸ This is a never-ending process for the pilgrim on the journey.

As we move along in our journey, we will want to be more and more explicit about the illuminating or revelatory event. But we will ask our question about the revelatory event not in terms of what propositions or concepts are most correct for us in the event, but "what persons do we meet in the revelatory event and what convictions about personal relation become our established principles in its presence?"³⁹

Again we see the narrative form as most crucial for understanding this journey, for it is relational through and through. Of course, we have in mind here a specific relationship with Jesus Christ, which again we can most

³⁸Ibid., p. 136.

³⁹Ibid., p. 143.

adequately express in confessional/narrative terms.

Interpretation of our meaning with the aid of a story is a well-known pedagogical device. . . . Yet what prompted Christians in the past to confess their faith by telling the story of their life was more than a need for vivid illustration or for analogical reasoning. Their story was not a parable which could be replaced by another; it was irreplaceable and untranslatable. An internal compulsion rather than free choice led them to speak of what they knew by telling about Jesus Christ and their relation to God through him.⁴⁰

Here we must make quite explicit that revelation is not something we have grasped for ourselves. It is not a relationship we have created with Jesus Christ, and it is not a relationship we may initiate. Here we pause to admit that we have left out of our discussion of narrative one aspect that the mythologies themselves posit as crucial: "the desire of gods to be known by humans, the pressure of transcendent revelation upon creatures who must then narrate or struggle in awe."⁴¹ This is true especially in our Judeo-Christian tradition, though we have often tended to demythologize by denying revelation and doing an etiological analysis about why this or that story was told (e.g., to illuminate the origin of some fact or practice in tribal history). If we approach the Christian Story, indeed the Biblical Story, as a story in and of itself, entering into its meaning and accenting its own integrity, we will see revelation as divine self-disclosure.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 46.

⁴¹Price, p. 28.

Again and again, it must be emphasized that the revelatory moment of Jesus Christ is not the revelation of a new ethic, or a new moral principle, but the revelation of the eternal righteousness of a personal God.

The original edition of the moral law is not handed to us in definitive form through the act of revelation. Let us rather say that when the lawgiver is revealed with his intentions the reasoning heart is granted the rudiment of a scholarly equipment by means of which, with much pain and labor it may through all its history work at the restoration of the fundamental text.⁴²

How does the specific revelation we have been referring to here, relate to the sacred story, the depth of mystery which we spoke of earlier? Is revelation of God in Jesus Christ really our first principle, the starting point of our worship, or isn't there a natural knowledge of God prior in time and in the logic of our hearts to revelation?

It is true that revelation is not the communication of new truths and the supplanting of our natural religion by a supernatural one. But it is the fulfillment and the radical reconstruction of our natural knowledge about deity through the revelation of one whom Jesus Christ called "Father." . . . Revelation is not a development of our religious ideas but their continuous conversion. God's self-disclosure is that permanent revolution in our religious life by which all religious truths are painfully transformed and all religious behavior transfigured by repentance and new faith.⁴³

How is revelation revolution? It is revolutionary in that we continually meet a God who radically calls into question all our concepts, all our stories. Revelation

⁴²Niebuhr, p. 171.

⁴³Ibid., p. 182.

thrusts us into the world of parable just as parable may open us to the revelatory word. Ultimate meaning, basic trust, life, value, goodness, power are constantly caught up in the great turmoil of transvaluation, as they are submitted to the light of the revelatory moment and relativized in God's demands to fulfill God's will.

"This conversion and permanent revolution of our human religion through Jesus Christ is what we mean by revelation."⁴⁴ It is the spiritual journey which each person alone and in community must undertake as he or she seeks to authentically respond to our originating event in Jesus Christ.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 191.

Chapter 3

SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN A CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

In this chapter we want to develop some ideas regarding Christian spiritual formation (What is it? Why is it valuable?), and then propose that story/storytelling is an especially appropriate way to "strengthen the spirit" or "aid in spiritual formation." This will be followed up by specific examples of stories and how they may be effectively employed in spiritual formation in chapter four.

The thesis we will pursue in this chapter begins where we left off in chapter two: On the one hand, we believe in the importance of getting in touch with the story in which we live and move and have our being. Our story has roots in a complex of relationships, in a depth of existence that remains largely mysterious. On the other hand, we believe in the importance of transcending our version of the story. Our Christian heritage supports the quest away from self-preoccupation, "self/saying," toward an Other or others. Here we encounter a primary paradox in a never ending series of the paradoxes which form the boundaries of our lives. In Luke (17.33) we have it stated in this way: "Whoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it, and whoever shall lose his life shall find it." A variation on the same theme:

The seed that is to grow
 must lose itself as seed;
 And they that creep
 may graduate through
 chrysalis to wings.

Wilt thou then, O mortal,
 cling to husks which
 falsely seem to you
 the self?

--Wu Ming Fu, Patterns in Jade¹

This paradox, I believe, forms the most profound boundary of our lives. But there are others, and they must be met and dealt with also.

Thus, our thesis: the spiritual journey is a journey through paradoxes or ambiguities in life toward ultimate meaning, and this journey has a narrative quality to it. Thus, it may be shaped most appropriately in a process of story/storytelling.

In view of our thesis, we will simply be exploring more specifically the passage through myth (recognizing the binary oppositions of our lives in paradoxes and ambiguities) to establish a hope of meaning/reconciliation in life and from thence the passage beyond the myth as we seek to respond to ever emerging or commanding revelations of meaning/reconciliation. Before we begin this task, let us say a word about why we find this thesis compelling.

¹Cited in Dorothy Berkley Phillips, Elizabeth Boyden Howes, and Lucille M. Nixon (eds.) The Choice Is Always Ours (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1975), p. 42.

Importance for Undertaking the Spiritual Journey

Again, we must begin with human experience. We have said that human experience in each momentary occasion is integrative and unitary. Yet we have also stressed that the moment rests in a context--a myriad of stimuli. That we unify these into a unitary occasion of experience is a fact of human existence; how we unify and subsequently organize our experience depends on varying aspects of each person's character or personality. Within the human family, and indeed the human personality, we find an inexhaustible list of aspects. However, we may pinpoint a few general or inclusive aspects that are useful for self-understanding. John Cobb begins the list by asserting that all these aspects find their roots in the two most intimate arenas of the self's experience: the body and the psyche.² These two major aspects of the self are quite interdependent, yet they are distinct, thus partly independent. We have learned how thoroughly the psyche may be influenced by the body in all its complexity as a society of organs and cells, and vice versa. It is helpful sometimes for the pursuit of health to distinguish aspects of the body. A strong and healthy body is generally the best support for a healthy and strong psyche.

²This discussion is based on John B. Cobb, Jr., "Strengthening the Spirit," Union Seminary Quarterly, XXX, 2-4 (Winter-Summer 1975), 130-139.

The distinctions between aspects of the psyche are more subtle. They often receive more attention in our culture than aspects of the body. Again, aspects of the psyche are distinct, yet apparently interdependent, and they generally support one another if they are in healthy balance. The first aspect of the psyche is the whole range of feelings which give rise to emotions. Experience, we have said, begins with feelings, but these are feelings shaped in part by the way the world objectively is. As we learn to balance subjectivity and objectivity in experience, we engage in another aspect of the self--aesthetics. The basic criterion for evaluating experience is aesthetic (see page 30 above). Aesthetic sensibility allows our feelings to be shaped by what is objectively there, as we grapple with and resonate to the harmony/intensity and complexity/simplicity around us, instead of attempting to a priori clothe the world in our feelings.

Openness to the forms of the given world can lead in another direction as well. The forms can be abstracted from their particular locus and compared with other forms. This is the work of reason, which relates ideas or forms rather than the particulars of aesthetic and creative experience.³

This aspect of the self may be divided further into the distinct aspects of practical reason (pragmatic manipulating of forms of the given world) and theoretical reason (simple understanding).

³Ibid., p. 131.

Creative use of abstracted forms in forming new relationships and applications, as well as the envisioning of forms not abstracted from anything in particular, introduces us to the realm of imagination. Thus we may dream new dreams and see mighty visions, either beatific or diabolical. We may become embarked on the road to what is only possible, not actual, and leave the world of reason behind. A tension arises here that we must seek constantly to overcome.

We may profitably explore the self in relation to each of these aspects of the person by investigating the stories of individuals. We will want to explore techniques later, but here we may assert that there is, again, a narrative quality revolving around each of these aspects with an underlying movement motif from one to the other. The self begins in a world of sensation and feelings. There it encounters the paradox of subjectivity vis-à-vis objectivity and moves to the aesthetic aspect for organizing feelings. Here are encountered the paradoxes of harmony vis-à-vis intensity and complexity vis-à-vis simplicity. In conjunction with, or as an alternative to an aesthetic organizing pattern, the self may engage in reason, there encountering the paradoxes of "things" vis-à-vis abstracted forms. In whatever aspect the "I" or self operates, most frequently, there seems always to be an attempt at reconciling paradoxes. And, there is a story in that process.

This is the mythic quest--the primary attempts of the self to orient itself in the world as a meaningful whole.

The development of imagination enables one to start the movement beyond the "myth"--to be confronted with images of required action, and be faced with a further paradox: choosing between courses of action. This paradox is qualitatively different than those before it, for it is experienced as forcing the self to act in accordance with "what is required" rather than what is "actually" experienced. This is where another aspect of the self appears: the will; and it is based on, yet transcends the other aspects for it seeks to take precedence and direct all the other aspects. This can, of course, be positive or negative, depending on how reason and imagination are employed "to determine what the possible alternatives are and to evaluate their consequences."⁴ Here we find the story of the ethical self, with all the comcommitant ambiguities of righteousness, justice, steadfastness, loyalty, obedience, responsibility, etc.

In the quest for the most appropriate action in life, the self meets its limits when called upon to accomplish the impossible. This is the revelatory call from beyond (or from deep within) which, again, totally relativizes the self and calls for the emergence of a new aspect

⁴Ibid., p. 133.

to transcend the self indicated in the will. Here is where spirit emerges, according to Cobb, and it is here that the greatest paradoxes are encountered--for it becomes clearer and clearer that in order to find this aspect of self, all others must be lost. This process may be focused in the shattering Christian paradox: I am responsible, yet not able. "The dimension of spirit can be associated most simply with radical self-objectification. Spiritual people view themselves in their totality and assume responsibility for themselves beyond their ability to alter themselves."⁵

When the self is called to radical love, the will finds itself incapable and must yield itself up to spirit. Aspiration toward a fulfillment of our potential is kindled in this aspect of the self. Such aspiration is seen less and less to arise simply from within--being experienced as a call--and is perceived more and more as unattainable by an act of the will. Yet the vision calls us toward a new possibility of fulfillment of our purposes and destiny, in which we may not only do what is right and true, but fully identify ourselves with a purity of motivation for the right and true. We may ultimately only do this by relying upon gifts rather than achievements.

Life is itself always a process of going beyond the given conditions. What merely repeats itself is inanimate, and where there is no life, inertia and entropy reign undisturbed. Life requires growth

⁵Ibid., p. 134.

which in all its forms involves some element of novelty and transcendence. The more fully the human self transcends itself, the more fully it is alive.⁶

Spirit as self-transcending self is what we want to deal with in this chapter. This is why we find the thesis so compelling. For it is this aspect of human character that puts us in touch with the transcending character of parable and revelation. It is that aspect which recognizes that one occupies a relative standpoint, and sees it is possible to "pass over" to other standpoints in a continual process of self-transcendence.

To put it in different terms, John Dunne has said that the challenge for human beings is to answer the question of meaning for ourselves while we are still in the process of becoming. To do this, we must "bring time to mind." This involves two major steps: (1) Bringing one's own lifetime to mind--passing over from the "immediate moment" of preoccupation with the present situation to the "existential moment" in which one's concerns and awareness are extended to one's future and one's past. We have identified this as the movement from body/feelings through aesthetics, to reason. (2) Bringing one's own "death-time" to mind--passing from the existential moment of concern for one's own lifetime to the "historic moment" in which

⁶John B. Cobb, Jr., "The Identity of Christian Spirituality and Global Consciousness," an unpublished paper presented at the School of Theology at Claremont, 1975, p. 5.

one's concern and awareness are extended to all time, both future and past. This we have identified as the movement from imagination, through will, to spirit.

The surest way to self-knowledge or the spiritual life of self-transcending self is a method of "passing over." This is based on three premises which we also identified in chapter two:

(a) what is true or false is so from some standpoint or other, (b) no standpoint whether it be the standpoint of the person him/herself or that of others in regard to him/herself is true or false in itself, and (c) it is possible to pass over from one standpoint to another.⁷

This is how we may "call time to mind" or dilate the present. It is a method obviously full of story--or narrative quality. It is encompassed by the paradox of lifetime vis-à-vis death time and is the journey of self beyond self toward ultimate meaning. Passing over

. . . can point toward what we might call "mystery," meaning by that term not unintelligibility but inexhaustible intelligibility, for the search from person to person involved in the process of passing over from standpoint to standpoint reveals each person as inexhaustible, incapable of being reduced to a single standpoint or to any sum of standpoints.⁸

Dunne sees this as a positive quest of mystery--a quest in New Testament terms of "the way, the truth, and the life." Life thus becomes a process of delving ever

⁷John Dunne, A Search for God in Time and Memory (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 5.

⁸Ibid., p. 7.

more deeply into the mystery of oneself and of others.

In the process, one discovers ever more light shed on the mystery of becoming in the universe and specifically in individual lives. And when one comes to affirm Jesus as Lord--the way, the truth, the life--it is because he is the One who sheds a light most powerful and unique on the mystery of oneself and others.

This sets the stage for the quest of Christian spirituality. It will be a quest largely focused upon Jesus of Nazareth in his becoming what he was meant to be--the Christ. Ultimately, our quest will become Jesus' quest for God. In the Biblical tradition, it is a quest for which we are all uniquely predisposed.

Christian Spirituality--Biblical and Theological Reflections

The Old Testament has no word for "spirituality," but it has a very well developed sense of the human quest for God.⁹ Every living being derives its vitality, its very life force from the spirit of life given by God. Spirit (ruach) is breath, a physical element. "It is the body's life-element."¹⁰ Without it, the body is lifeless

⁹The following discussion on the Old Testament understanding of spirituality is based on Rolf Knierim, "The Spirituality of the Old Testament," an unpublished paper presented at the School of Theology at Claremont, 1975.

¹⁰Knierim, p. 4.

dust and earth. This "breath of life" which Yahweh breathed into human nostrils is not a divine substance. "It is the spirit of life but not the spirit of God breathed into the humans. It is the spirit coming from God, but not the spirit of God."¹¹ Thus, all living creatures are in a natural sense, spiritually conditioned, or they are not alive.

Here we see spiritual existence as firmly rooted in the experience of life as life. "It is the basic spiritual reality, a mystery and miracle to be marveled at as that which is elevated out of dust above death."¹² Our most basic response to life as life is one of trusting gratitude. Praise of God becomes our natural act of returning breath to God who has given us breath.

With this understanding, the Old Testament further speaks of God's spirit falling upon people.

What is meant with the spirit of Yahweh befalling these charismatics is, first of all, an intensification of livelihood and agitation, an outburst of energy which enables them to rise to or above a particular occasion and do extraordinary things. They are manifestations of a heightened force of vitality at work in specific circumstances.¹³

Such gifting to human beings of God's spirit is congruent with the basic "life-igniting and sustaining spiritual endowment"¹⁴ granted all human beings, enabling Yahweh's own

¹¹Ibid., p. 5.

¹²Ibid., pp. 7-8.

¹³Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 10.

spirit (again a "physical" breath or wind) to manifest itself in specific ways. Sometimes, Yahweh's spirit is understood to be indwelling special persons, not just momentary charismatic outbursts. As such, the spirit of Yahweh is understood to thoroughly relativize every aspect of the human being and direct them toward God.

"The spirit of Yahweh shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and fear of Yahweh" (Isaiah 11.2). "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the spirit of Yahweh, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin" (Micah 3.8). "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the men-servants and the maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit" (Joel 3.28f).

Rolf Knierim sees in the Old Testament a growing awareness of the need to distinguish the activity of Yahweh's own spirit from perceptions of spirit as either life force (and thus purely human potential) or a force however used by Yahweh, yet basically not in accordance with Yahweh's purposes or identity (the problem of evil). The continual preoccupation of the Old Testament people was their encounter with God--which gave rise to their

intense emphasis on "the spirit of Yahweh."

Israel was not so much concentrating on the spirit of life as it concentrated on the breath of God's own life revealing Yahweh . . . this coming of God/Yahweh through . . . spirit was far from being understood as making the humans divine. Rather, it meant that for the humans, God . . . has become a possibility and reality of genuine experience, even a most personal experience. . . .¹⁵

God's spirit saves human life from failure, guilt, and lostness, and sends us toward fulfillment of life in the light of ultimate meaning (we live from God, in God, and toward God).

It is with this sort of understanding that the psalmist fervently prays: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit" (Psalm 51.10-12).

The use of the word "heart" in this psalm parallels spirit and is understood as complementary to it. That is, the heart is the "anthropological complementation to the cosmological and theological 'spirit,' and as such is structured to be susceptible to the influence of 'spirit' and its notions."¹⁶ The Old Testament understanding of heart is similar to our understanding of "mind" or "psyche" (discussed above in the section on aspects of character), with all its different aspects of feeling, aesthetics,

¹⁵Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 20.

reason, imagination, etc. Heart is understood to be dependent on "spirit" for its vitality and dependent on "God's spirit" for true guidance and orientation. For the heart is susceptible to other "spirits" which may corrupt or pervert it.

As heart strives to exist in a complementary balance between its life source and its highest calling, it finds itself confronted with the limits of its own ability as we have discussed. Yet, the spirit of God calls for ever new and whole actualizations of our basic spiritual endowment. We have identified "spirit" as that aspect of human character which somehow accomplishes this. I believe (with Knierim) that our understanding can be enhanced by attention to the use of the word "hokmah" or "wisdom" in the Old Testament. Knierim identifies wisdom as an attitude "in which the 'heart,' under the influence of the 'spirit,' is put to work for the reasonable mastering of life in the context of reality."¹⁷ I think we may modify "reasonable mastering" to mean "creative use of all aspects of one's character in the reverent living of one's life."

Knierim asserts that in Old Testament understanding, wisdom consisted basically in two things: fear of Yahweh/God and knowledge of Yahweh/God.

"You shall fear Yahweh your God" (Deuteronomy

¹⁷Ibid., p. 25.

6.13). "Fear," says Knierin, encompasses terms such as to love Yahweh (Deut. 10.12), to serve and cleave to Yahweh (Deut. 10.20), to walk in the way of Yahweh (Deut. 8.6), and to follow Yahweh (Deut. 13.5). Thus, "fear of Yahweh is the ethicized attitude of humble reverence, and not the shock of terror."¹⁸ Throughout especially the Psalms and the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, "those fearing Yahweh/God" is a characteristic statement indicating the people of Yahweh, those loyal to Yahweh, etc. As Proverbs 1.7 states, "The fear of Yahweh is the foundation of wisdom."

The emergence of the knowledge of Yahweh/God seems to have its roots in experience, through which Yahweh made Yahweh's self (Exodus 6.13; Ps. 9.17; 48.8; 77.15, 20; 79.10; 88.13; 98.2; 103.7), Yahweh's name (Isaiah 64.1; Ps. 76.2), or the contents of Yahweh's manifestations known (Exodus 25.22; Ezek. 20.11; Nehemiah 9.14; II Samuel 7.21; Genesis 41.39; Jeremiah 11.18; etc.). This aspect points to a dialectical structure in the Old Testament concept of the knowledge of God: It is not the product of active human imagining about God. Rather, it is the result of the actively appropriated (self) manifestations of Yahweh/God.¹⁹

All God's people should have knowledge of God, for Yahweh manifests God's self in history. Knowledge of God is gained also through the fulfillment of Yahweh's words, especially in the prophetic and prophetically influenced traditions (Josh. 23.14; II Kings 10.10; Jeremiah 32.8; 44.28f; Ezekial 6.10; 17.21; 37.14; Deut. 18.21f; Jeremiah 28.9; Hosea 6.5, etc.).

¹⁸Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 28.

Again we find the source of spirituality is God. This must never be lost sight of. Again, we may best understand this in terms of paradox. Our knowledge of God is our own, yet it is dependent on and driven by the God who has God's own identity and never becomes merely an object of faith even among the best servants. "In this sense, it is correct to say that their spirituality is the work of the one whom they know. . . . Those who are supposed to know God have ultimately to confess that their knowledge of God consists in that God knows them."²⁰

O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me!
 Thou knowest when I sit down and
 when I rise up;
 thou discernest my thoughts from afar.
 Thou searchest out my path and my lying down
 and art acquainted with all my ways.
 Even before a word is on my tongue,
 lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.
 Thou dost beset me behind and before,
 and layest thy hand upon me.
 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
 it is high, I cannot attain it.

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
 Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
 If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!
 If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!
 If I take the wings of the morning
 and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
 even there thy hand shall lead me,
 and thy right hand shall hold me.
 If I say, "let only darkness cover me,
 and the light about me be night,"
 even the darkness is not dark to thee,
 The night is as bright as the day;
 for darkness is as light with thee.

²⁰Ibid., p. 36.

For thou didst form my inward parts,
 thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb.
 I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful.
 Wonderful are thy works!
 Thou knowest me right well;
 my frame was not hidden from thee,
 When I was being made in secret,
 intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.
 Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance;
 in thy book were written, every one of them,
 the days that were formed for me,
 when as yet there was none of them.
 How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God!
 How vast is the sum of them!
 If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
 When I awake, I am still with thee.

 Search me, O God, and know my heart!
 Try me and know my thoughts!
 And see if there be any wicked way in me,
 and lead me in the way everlasting!
Psalm 139.1-10, 23-24

Our search for fear and knowledge of God takes
 place within the dialectic of God's self-manifestations
 and our own ability or capacity or gift to recognize God
 all around us. Christians believe that in Jesus of
 Nazareth we have this dialectic personified, for he is
 both a decisive manifestation of God and our chief model
 of the spiritual person. Jesus has power for us not only
 as an image, but as an ongoing contemporary presence, as
 we shall see.

Jesus manifests God to us by his words and the
 images/symbols they powerfully invoke. What we may discern
 both in Jesus' words and in the story of Jesus' actions,
 is a continual serendipity with a twist of command about
 them. We are jogged from our complacency about ourselves
 and confronted with our own inertia, our own blocking of

the creative advance of God, because of insecurity and anxiety. We can, in those moments, opt for another style, another stance or standpoint, and thus find ourselves justified by God--blessed by a word of grace. Thus, we are encouraged by Jesus to transcend ourselves. This is, as we have said, the function of parable, for which Jesus himself was the paradigm par excellence, as we shall see.

It is in the quest for such self-transcending experience that we pay close attention to the life of Jesus. It is possible, as we have seen, to "pass over" from one standpoint to another, and that is what we may do by affirming the humanity of Jesus. But if we affirm Jesus' humanity, we must maintain that the subjective standpoint of Jesus was relative, and that like us, he had as many subjective standpoints in his life as he had different moments. Such standpoints differ both quantitatively (the relationship between past and future being shorter or longer depending on where the person stands in his/her life) and qualitatively (the past and future being viewed differently before and after turning points in one's life).

In our own interactions or encounters with the Gospel narratives, we develop our particular hermeneutic. We must learn how to responsibly read the material for both its historical accuracy and for its personal value. A quest for the historical Jesus will have considerable bearing on the authenticity of our attempts at "passing over"

to Jesus' standpoint.²¹ Most contemporary Biblical scholars are very cautious about the accuracy of the history presented in the Gospels.²² However, we may affirm two things at least. First, Jesus seems to have been a person of extraordinary religious depth and insight who could "convict" people he encountered and turn them decisively toward God for a new understanding of their relationship with God. Second, we too may be decisively "convicted" in our own encounter with the Gospel stories and turn toward God for a new understanding of our relationship to God.

In each of these life experiences, we may see Jesus as a catalyst or caller for self-transcending experiences (which leads us to conjecture that he too constantly transcended self over and over again). John Cobb calls this a process of creative transformation. As we have pointed out before, it is a process common to everything that exists in the world to a greater or lesser extent, including God. That is, "in every event innumerable strands of influence come to bear and are integrated into a new unity."²³ In that event there are aspects other

²¹For a relevant meditational possibility for such an understanding of Jesus' standpoint, see appendix 4. This is not an understanding based on the most strenuous Biblical exegesis.

²²See James M. Robinson, A New Quest of the Historical Jesus (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979).

²³John B. Cobb, Jr., Christ in a Pluralistic Age (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 66.

than purely causal ingredients.

. . . [E]ach momentary experience can be seen as the meeting place of past actuality experienced as the demand for some measure of conformation and certain unrealized possibilities experienced as worthy of actualization. The aim at becoming--and at becoming in such a way as to achieve some optimum of satisfaction, immediately and also for the sake of a wider future--is a factor in human experience that should not be reduced to the conformal pressures of the past. It is the principle of novelty, spontaneity, growth, and self transcendence.²⁴

Personal self-transcendence also participates in an ontological transcendence.

The logos is the cosmic principle of order, the ground of meaning, and the source of purpose. Whitehead has called this transcendent source of the aim at the new, the principle of concretion, the principle of limitation, the organ of novelty, the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire, the divine Eros, and God in God's Primordial Nature.²⁵

This Logos, as it becomes incarnate, Christians call Christ.

"The Logos in its transcendence is timeless and infinite, but in its incarnation or immanence it is always a specific force for just that creative transformation which is possible and optimal in each situation."²⁶

As we follow Jesus by attempting to experience self-transcendence as he did, we engage in that process John Dunne calls bringing lifetime to mind. That is, we dilate the present, moving beyond the meaning of becoming as the relationship between each immediate moment in one's

²⁴Ibid., p. 69.

²⁵Ibid., p. 71.

²⁶Ibid., p. 72.

life to include the existential moment where concern is extended to one's past and future. Becoming is thus the relationship between one's whole life taken one way at one point and one's whole life taken another way at another way at another point. No one way of taking one's life is exhaustive or absolute as we discover by "passing over" to other's standpoints. This starts us then on a quest for the truth, the way, the life--in short, mystery.

Yet, just when we might imagine ourselves in the process of creative transformation along with Jesus, and thus in touch with God's creative, responsive love, trusting and relying on this in faith, the parabolic nature of Jesus' life brings to mind deathtime.

Passing over from the standpoint of life to the standpoint of death means coming to the objective probability [historically verifiable at some future date] or to the subjective certainty ["I will surely die."] of one's own death and is analogous to the act of dying.²⁷

What I will discover in this process is ignorance--ignorance of the meaning of my life and the life of others, as well as their ignorance. Indeed, the meaning of the cross is that all our cherished accomplishments, all our coveted ideals, all our struggles for the best in life, for success, for praise in God's (or anyone's) eyes is called into question. We feel lost in time. For time and life make no sense to us and we are doomed to wait, wait for the future

²⁷Dunne, p. 18.

which never comes to dawn . . . wait for rescue out of meaninglessness. What we, in effect, come to is overwhelming desire to escape from ourselves, our pain and sorrow and dissatisfaction. We long, in a sense, to become gods, to be completely detached from that which gives us sorrow.

But if we embrace the Christian structure of existence, if we embrace Jesus as not simply a great man who lived a noble life and died a noble death, but as the Christ, then we may pass from the standpoint of death to the standpoint of life and in passing over, discover inexhaustible meaning in life and in death. So we "rise from the dead." Now we may understand what Paul meant when he said what Christians are supposed to do in regard to Christ: be buried with him in death in order to be raised with him into life.

By embracing the distinctively Christian structure of existence, I mean entering fully into the paradox of responsibility yet inability we mentioned before. As Cobb puts it, "the self observes itself in its tension with grace and its unlimited capacity to distort God's gift. The self holds itself responsible for its way of dealing inwardly with this gift, as well as with the outward behavior that it knows itself to control."²⁸ Yet the self repeatedly finds itself unable to adequately or fully

²⁸Cobb, Christ in a Pluralistic Age, p. 109.

respond to God's gift of grace. Jesus apparently took this paradox most seriously. In the sayings of Jesus we find expressed "a peculiarly immediate and undistorted insight into life . . . Jesus spoke, and otherwise acted, as if he regarded himself as having peculiar authority."²⁹ The insight of Jesus, I believe, is into this basic paradox of life. In the parables, for instance, we often find a story of people who felt or thought they were righteous, yet who were not justified in God's eyes. Jesus' peculiar authority derived from the reconciliation of the paradox in his life. Herein lies his divinity. We may say that though Christ is incarnate in everyone, Jesus is Christ, because the incarnation is constitutive of his very selfhood. He was still himself, still an "I" which integrates experiences on the basis of its personal past, but in co-relationship with God. That is, Jesus' self was co-constituted by its influence from its personal past and by the initial aim derived from God.

Yet it was not enough for Jesus to become the Christ or be the Christ (i.e., the self-transforming one). He must do the work of Christ by turning topsy turvy the meaning of what it means to be divine. Our inability to live as resurrected beings is that our passion to become gods is the reverse of God's passion to become human. It

²⁹John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin, Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 104.

is thus with some shock and bewilderment that we come to see Jesus as being in the process of emptying himself, aiming not at becoming God, but at becoming human--at being open to pain and suffering and mystery, not at escaping from them. If we feel called to follow Christ, then surely we too must lose our desire to be God.

This implies that there is a unity between the passion of God and the passion of humans. What humans attempt to accomplish, losing oneself as a human being in order that God may be born, is actually accomplished when one loses oneself as God in order that humans may be born.³⁰

And, surprisingly, this is the way to the "era of Christ"--to exaltation and glory--to rising with Christ (John 5.24; I John 3.14).

What such a process brings us to is a knowledge of ignorance. For one can never be sure what the outcome will be in losing oneself. Even Jesus did not know as we can see by his changing and relative standpoints--strikingly illustrated in his prayer in Gethsemane or his cry on the cross: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

It is the acknowledgement of ignorance, the openness toward mystery, that authenticates both the passion of people and the passion of God. We can understand what it is to desire to be God through fulfillment of desire or through hardening against pain and deprivation or through renunciation of hope and fear, and so we can understand conversely what it is to aim at being human rather than God. When we make humanity our aim, however, and enter thereby into a sympathetic understanding of the passion of Christ, we discover that the fulfilled or hardened or detached being that

³⁰Dunne, p. 22.

we had imagined to be divine on the basis of our own desire to be God is not the genuine God, but the genuine God is the one who loses self as God in order that human persons may be born.³¹

In the life of Jesus as presented by the Gospel writers and understood by Paul we observe kenosis--emptying; for him a process of becoming human. At the same time a process of exaltation or rising was taking place in the shape of the acceptance by God he was receiving and experiencing. Though from our standpoint, we may see Jesus' life as more or less either a process of Jesus becoming Lord or the Lord becoming Jesus, from Jesus' standpoint the process was simply one of becoming who he is. We may be like Jesus--open to the mystery of becoming who we are--because the Christ of faith empowers us to live a new life of creative transformation. That is, we may live our lives in a dialectic between our attempts to appropriate Jesus for ourselves (in which process we more or less fail) and our appropriation by the Christ event.

The real past event of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, involving his total being, has objectively established a sphere of effectiveness or a field of force into which people can enter. To enter the field is to have the efficacy of the salvation event become causally determinative of increasing aspects of one's total life.³²

We may understand such a field of force by referring to our earlier discussion regarding the nature of

³¹Ibid., p. 23.

³²Cobb, Christ in a Pluralistic Age, p. 117.

experience. For human beings especially, the ingredients of experience include not only the past but also our memory of the past. As such, the past in its purity has causal efficacy on the present which may be enhanced by our memory of it. This effect may be multiplied by specific attention to a past event, and conformity to it. "I" conform myself to an event by consciously organizing my experience so as to include that event. "I" is constantly changing because that is the nature of experience, i.e., reality. Yet, it remains often closely identical to the "I" of each previous moment of the personal past. But there is no ontological reason why this should be so. St. Paul was in fact able to allow another field of force besides his own past to co-constitute the "I" of each moment. That was the salvation occurrence of Jesus Christ. "As a bearer of Christ's life, he was open to being continuously creatively transformed by the Logos."³³ With great conviction he could say to the church at Philippi:

Have this mind among yourselves
 which you have in Christ Jesus,
 who, though he was in the form of God
 did not count equality with God
 a thing to be grasped,
 but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant,
 being born in the likeness of humans.

And being found in human form he humbled himself
 and became obedient unto death, even death
 on a cross.

³³Ibid., p. 125

Therefore God has highly exalted him
 and bestowed on him the name which is
 above every name,
 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2.5-11

We return again and again in our spiritual quest to God--our ultimate source and lure. Jesus always couched his own authority and calls to commitment and discipleship in God--specifically the kingdom of God. We remember God and only God, thus balancing "finding oneself" with "losing oneself." We do not "lose ourselves" for exaltation or to find ourselves, we "lose ourselves" for and in God. God's kingdom highlights our inhumanity to one another, and the stark contrast of God's immersion into that evil condition in the person of Jesus. To that base situation of injustice and oppression came a person of peculiar authority and power--Jesus of Nazareth, who proclaimed the need for repentance and the imminence of the kingdom of God. In light of our discussion above, Jesus' call to repentance may be considered as a radical sort of interiorization of our relationship to God. But in conjunction with the proclamation of the kingdom of God, a new dimension is proposed for our spiritual quest.

This is reminiscent of our Old Testament emphasis on fear and knowledge of God. God reveals God's self in history. God makes concrete demands of God's people.

Isaiah and Jesus proclaim the Year of Jubilee--a time of topsy turvy: forgiving debts, sharing land, losing wealth, helping the poor and orphaned, healing the sick, freeing the oppressed, etc. What is different about the proclamation in the Gospels is its intimate association with the person of Jesus. The salvation offered in the kingdom of God is already begun in Jesus. We can see how this makes sense by referring again to our discussion of creative transformation in him. Again, Jesus' salvific function may be understood in terms of a field of force. Within this field, we ourselves are transformed. Yet, again, we may not stop here, for we are called to transform reality in view of a vision of the kingdom of God which we have seen begun in Jesus and for which we hope. This is the new dimension of our spiritual quest--the call to become transformers of reality ourselves. This we understand to be a task performed within the field of force generated by the ongoing originating Christ event, and carried on in Christian communities.

Jon Sobrino says that this task will be eschatological in nature.

First of all, eschatology means "crisis" even though it has to do with proclaiming "good News." God's kingdom does not confirm the present reality of humankind and its history, rather it passes judgement on that reality in order to recreate it. . . . Hence, the concept of "eschatology" is wholly consistent with Jesus' fundamental demand for a conversion (metanoia).³⁴

³⁴Jon Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads

Secondly, "eschatology" will have a historico-temporal character--a concrete work of service and reconciliation. Here, specific political, economic, and social factors must be carefully considered and utilized in building the kingdom according to our best vision of it in Jesus Christ. As Ignacio Ellacuria has said, "The Messiah had a clearly political dimension; Jesus tried to transcend this impression but did not try to evade it."³⁵

Thirdly, "eschatology" will have a present aspect. Negatively, the kingdom of God condemns present existence, for nothing "corresponds" to the kingdom.

. . . [P]ositively, . . . it unveils another kind of existence that does "correspond" to the kingdom. For us that form of existence is the following of Jesus. Subjectively, that means we must be open to living a life like that of Jesus. Objectively it means that we must be open to the work of transforming reality.³⁶

Story/storytelling becomes an indispensable part of this process, for the story moves us beyond paradoxes, while acknowledging that our existence is limited by paradox. Stories move us from where we are to where we could be or ought to be. Stories communicate most powerfully the images which shape our consciousnesses and keep us in touch with the dreams and visions God might have us live

(Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), p. 65.

³⁵Ignacio Ellacuria, Freedom Made Flesh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), p. 49.

³⁶Sobrino, p. 66.

toward.

In the next chapter, we will pick up on a few of the motifs and themes touched on in the previous chapters, and demonstrate the value of specific stories for the enhancement or formation of the spiritual journey.

Chapter 4

STORY/STORYTELLING AS A TOOL IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Christian Discipline

Within the Christian Story, as we have seen, the motif of journey or quest haunts and animates the pilgrim who lives in sin and yet participates in God's grace. The spiritual quest derives its impetus from the grand Christian paradox of promise and demand--of announcement and call. For me, the paradox is most vividly real when I meditate on Mark 1.12-15.

As I read the passage in the gospel of Mark, I can imagine an old man in a village in Galilee. A young boy from a neighboring village excitedly explains that a great prophet will arrive shortly and announce that the kingdom of God is near! The old man feels the weight of waiting rest uneasily on his shoulders. He laughs in skeptical contempt. Yet he can't help entertaining those ancient images! Israel for the Jews, the end of Roman taxes, joy and freedom of worship, wealth and thanksgiving; God's sovereignty recognized and acknowledged by everyone everywhere; and an end to injustice, oppression, sorrow and pain.

I reflect on my own images of the kingdom. I see a crazy kaleidoscope of beautifully neat cities, orderly

croplands, prosperous citizens. The air is clean, the water sweet and pure. Government is for the people, by the people, and of the people. The highest goals in the lives of all people are to find meaning in self-transcending/transforming journeys toward God.

I am that man in Galilee, hoping against hope: waiting to have the kingdom come--now--ready made, laid at my feet. I'm ready for wealth, ready for peace, ready for love among human beings, ready for an ecologically sane lifestyle. Don't kid around with me, God! Make good on this announcement!

So, I watch the little cloud of dust on the horizon as it moves closer. A crowd surrounds the prophet and he approaches slowly. "Which one is he?" "The one in the middle." God, he looks awful! Emaciated, worn out they tell me from sojourning in the desert for forty days. His eye sockets are hollowed out, shadowed, yet the eyes glow with an immense fire. A disturbing spirit drives this man. Dismayed, I fall back. This man can't announce the kingdom! He displays no wealth. His visage shows the effects of pain and poverty! I discern no peace in those burning eyes. He speaks the announcement: "The time has come and the reign of God is near." Overwhelmed by the incongruence between this man and his announcement as I envision it, I cry out. He turns and with great urgency speaks directly to me: "Repent and believe this good news."

Stunned, I hear a screaming in my mind. This is not just announcement, it is call! How do you answer a call like that?

So, the journey begins--or is it just my awareness of the journey? All the elements of the quest become so sharply focused for a moment in that Markan pericope--the sense of waiting, hoping, longing; the sense of dissatisfaction, sinfulness, judgment; the sense of being sought by another as much as seeking for an Other; the sense of a self-transcending call to action. The Christian pilgrim seeks two things: to remain sensitive to these sensations--i.e., open to the Word of God--and to authentically respond--i.e., do God's will in perfect obedience. As we have seen, we know we need God's help in this quest, yet we are responsible to the quest. For these reasons, Christian pilgrims have developed and practiced "spiritual disciplines" for the following out of the quest.

Traditional types of spiritual disciplines include: memory (ritual), prayer, meditation, worship, study, fasting, contemplation, dream interpreting, service, and many others. Let us briefly examine a few of these.

The most profound Christian rituals are the sacraments of baptism, Eucharist, penance, healing, marriage, and ordination. These rites offer rebirth and cleansing, transformation, renewal out of failure, guilt and fear, physical and mental healing, meaning in the intense

relational intimacy of a marital covenant and commitment, and the acknowledgment of the spiritual in our daily religious practice. As Morton Kelsey has said,

The sacraments provide a base of reality for the inward journey. They keep us in touch with the historical reality of Christianity, the way God entered into the world in Christ, and also with the importance of our physical nature, both in itself and in giving God ways to break through into the outer, physical world. The sacraments make us realize how important the simplest, most physical acts can be as ways of allowing God to reveal God's self to us. Commonplace actions which we often ignore, like touching, bathing, eating, can become the most important ways of opening our lives to God.¹

The practice of praying also has many aspects: adoration, confession, intercession, petition, and contemplation. Frank Kimper has said,

. . . for me praying involves both decision and discipline. In a very real way it is an active effort to be passively attentive and responsive to the pulse-beat and purposive thrust of the Universe. I pray only when in a very self-conscious way I choose to assume that mental and spiritual posture which allows me to experience a given moment in cosmic perspective: i.e., to get a glimpse of the ongoingness of LIFE and be grasped by the lure of the seemingly impossible possibilities in my "being in the world"--to become aware of, and responsive to, the Creative Thrust of BECOMING that is quietly bubbling up through my being like a Spring of Living Water.²

Awareness may be fostered by simple adoration or contemplation, examples of which are abundant in the Psalms.

¹Morton Kelsey, The Other Side of Silence (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), p. 195.

²Frank Kimper, "Musings about the Dynamics of Prayer" (an unpublished paper presented at the School of Theology at Claremont, 1974), p. 16.

Responsiveness may be cultivated by confession and petition, the exercise of ascertaining just where we stand, who we are, what we need. The activities of reflective thinking, of conversion, and of personal renewal give one a proper perspective which is willing to face everything and rely upon the Creative Presence of God to become truly loving. Practice in the art of loving may begin with intercession--the recognition that all of life is truly relational and that I may unselfishly give myself to the best future for someone else.

Rituals and prayers may be greatly enhanced and deepened in meditation, worship, study, fasting, and service. Each discipline, in fact, contributes to and is strengthened by all the others. In worship, many (if not all) the disciplines are linked together in liturgy, in which the drama of the journey comes to life. Liturgy is properly a "work of the people"--an expression by the People of God of their pilgrimage. Ideally, such liturgies will both recognize the constancy of God (in the remembrance parts of worship) and the restless ongoing dynamic of God (in the prayerful, homiletic and commissioning parts of worship). Creating liturgies which are meaningful is not easy, nor is it ever a completed process. The never-ending process becomes the journey and demands decision and discipline.

Each of the spiritual disciplines focuses the

pilgrim--helping him or her to pay attention to that which is needful, helpful, instructive, true, and valuable. A life steeped in Christian discipline will manifest ultimate meaning--the lure of God in Christ. Such a life will not be free of suffering, "but this is only part of the growing process, and not the end of it."³ The practice of the disciplines leads to the goals or purposes of their practice in a self-justifying circle or wheel of life. Yet, it will not be a circle of stagnation, but a wheel to the future kingdom of God which is already manifest in Jesus and manifesting in Christ.

As Thomas Merton has said:

The real purpose of prayer (in the fully personal sense as well as in the Christian assembly) is the deepening of personal realization in love, the awareness of God (even if sometimes this awareness may amount to a negative factor, a seeming "absence"). The real purpose of meditation--or at least that which recommends itself as most relevant for modern persons--is the exploration and discovery of new dimensions in freedom, illumination and love, in deepening our awareness of our life in Christ.

What is the relation of all this to action? Simply this. The one who attempts to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening his/her own understanding, freedom, integrity, and capacity to love, will not have anything to give but the contagion of his/her own obsessions, aggressiveness, ego-centered ambitions, delusion about ends and means, and doctrinaire prejudices and ideas. . . .

But prayer and meditation have an important part to play in opening up new ways and new horizons. If our prayer is the expression of a deep and grace inspired desire for newness of life and not the mere blind attachment to what has always been familiar and "safe"--God will act in us and through us to renew the church

³Kelsey, p. 139.

by preparing, in prayer, what we cannot yet imagine or understand. In this way our prayer and faith today will be oriented toward the future which we ourselves may never see fully realized on earth.⁴

Story/Storytelling as a Spiritual Discipline

It seems obvious to me that what we engage in when we practice spiritual disciplines is a participation in the reality of God which has been revealed historically in Jesus the Christ. We continually seek to be restored to the reality of God and to find new meaning from that reality.

Every intimation of my own unique relationship to this Primal Thrust within the fluid life-situation in which I participate is perceived in imagery, portraying meanings rather than stating them in logical categories--dramatizing in story form . . . the action being initiated in the depths of my being. When I allow this symbolic language to communicate its own meanings spontaneously, I find myself perceiving my world in ever-new perspective, so that my way of relating to it is continuously being modified.⁵

Images are not only constituent of religion but of central importance to it. This can be observed in the lives of Christian pilgrims from the ancient church right up to the present. The images which shape our lives are not simply peripheral to our faith, but provide its very substance. As James McClendon states, powerful images interrelate to form a life story that constitutes the

⁴Thomas Merton, Contemplation in a World of Action (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 164-165.

⁵Kimper, p. 16.

vision, character, and action of individuals.

By images, I mean metaphors whose content has been enriched by a previous, prototypical employment so that their application causes the object to which they are applied to be seen in multiply-reflected light; they are traditional or canonical metaphors, and as such they bear the content of faith itself.⁶

In each of the spiritual disciplines we have briefly enumerated, the ultimate goal or purpose is to identify our lives with the Life of God or the Reality of God or the "Primal Thrust." To do this means getting in touch as thoroughly and intimately as possible with the images of that Life/Reality which appear (are revealed) as most authentic pointers to God. In doing this we transcend the images as mere images and, in fact, contact the Reality which underlies and surrounds each reality. Thus, I believe that story/storytelling is the spiritual discipline par excellence. For in the telling/hearing of stories, the very narrative quality of our experience is engaged and (for good or ill) turned toward an image of what life means or could mean. ". . . [T]he story is the best instrument to convey the incompleteness, the ambiguity, the power, and the wonderful absurdity of . . . the pilgrimage"⁷ we identified in chapter three. Again, this practice entails decision and discipline: focused attention and response.

⁶James McClendon, Biography as Theology (Nashville: Abington Press, 1976), p. 97.

⁷Urban Holmes, Ministry and Imagination (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 177.

When we intentionally practice the discipline of story/storytelling, we recognize the universal truth in the fact that humans move to meaning through all aspects of the personality and metaphor, with the metaphor contained within a story that lies within our primordial awareness. The greatest metaphor for Christians is "The Christ" which is incarnate throughout God's creation in varying ways.

We will want to pay attention to the following aspects of the discipline of story/storytelling: the process individuals go through in appropriating a series of images, the content/nature of the images (cultural, personal, historical, universal), the forms of the stories (autobiography, folk tales, fables, fairy tales, legends, sagas, myths, fantasy, parable, etc.), and the interrelationships between my story, your story, and God's story. For purposes of getting a handle on story/storytelling as a concrete discipline, we will use the categories "my story," "your story," and "God's story" to discover a way of practice. We agree with Urban Holmes that,

The problem for theology is how the stories I am told in this age (your story), the story by which I am living (my story), and the biblical story (God's Story) can be brought together in one unified intention or . . . be conjoined. This is the prerequisite of effective living in the Christian community for each of us.⁸

⁸ Ibid.

The distinction among these categories will be artificial (as the integration we have striven for in the previous chapters attests to). However, the distinctions will be useful for developing a method and we can deal finally with how the three categories are conjoined not just by their very narrative nature, but intentionally in the Christian community and individual pilgrim (see chapter five).

My Story

John Dunne points out an interesting aspect of the human story. "The human thing is not merely to live, to act, to love. It is to have relationship to one's life, one's action, one's love, even if the relationship is simply one of consent, simply a 'Yes.'"⁹ It is in the telling of our own story that the mundane or trivial facts are connected, related. Lewis Ford distinguishes between "affections" ("those emotional tones originating out of the mind's own response to that which it is perceiving and contemplating") and "passions" ("those emotional tones the mind derives from feeling the feelings of its bodily members").¹⁰ In other words, "We do not merely feel what we feel, but how we feel what we feel makes a difference.

⁹ John Dunne, Time and Myth (Notre Dame: University Press, 1975), p. 20.

¹⁰ Lewis Ford, "Our Prayers as God's Passions," in Harry Cargas and Bernard Lee (eds.) Religious Experience

. . ."¹¹ In telling our own stories we enhance our passionate connectedness with our selves and all of life; a positive goal or mode of being in Christian spiritual formation.

The story we tell becomes the way in which we grasp the meaning of our life when in story we can put ourselves into relation with the boundaries of our lives. "By putting 'into relation' we are saying what those things mean in relation to the person."¹² This is a self-transcending enterprise which will take time and effort to develop. Its development is in keeping with what we have said regarding knowing one's own standpoint, especially in light of the great paradoxes or boundaries of life.

I suggest the following techniques, ideas, and stories for "telling my story." The format within which they are set is that of the weekend workshop. However, the number of suggestions makes it clear that ideally this process of "telling my story" would go on beyond a weekend. The format also utilizes small group sharing--in keeping with what we have said about the social character of story/storytelling and the need for teller and listener. The purpose of the techniques, ideas, and stories offered (as stated before) is to begin the process of the spiritual journey of self-transcendence, to know who I am (self-

and Process Theology (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 433.

¹¹Ibid., p. 432.

¹²Holmes, p. 178.

identity) in the journey, and to acknowledge and accept my self and the boundaries or paradoxes within which I live, move and have my being. The overall goal is to feel I am on the road to ultimate meaning from ultimate meaning-- i.e., to find God in relationship. Thus, the exercises will point in several instances to the other two categories of "your story" and "God's story."¹³

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Exercises</u>
Introductions (In a circle.)	1. Name Game: Introduce yourself by stating name and favorite color. Next person introduces him or herself in the same manner <u>and</u> the previous person again. <u>Continue</u> around the circle with each successive person having to introduce (and thus remember) more people.
(In small groups of 3-5 people.)	2. "Three True, One False": Each individual should make a list of these 4 items: (a) favorite hobby; (b) hero/heroine at age 12; (c) favorite music; (d) satisfying personal achievement. For <u>one</u> answer make a false statement. Each group member then will share his/her list while the rest of the group attempts to guess which item is false.

Rationale/Reflections

These two exercises begin the process of story/ storytelling by naming and identifying people. These two exercises provide the rudiments of a story, and a group leader might reflect with the group on the power of "naming" and "identifying." A kind of power to manipulate/ control is granted when I divulge my name and other

¹³A list of resources for all the following exercises (My Story, Your Story, God's Story) appears at the

information about myself. This raises questions of trust and vulnerability and the need of individuals to feel comfortable yet to take risks.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Exercises</u>
Outline for the Workshop.	Feedback; Questions and Answers

Rationale/Reflections

I believe it is important for people to know ahead what they may be in for, when there will be breaks, what and when to eat, when to rest, etc.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Exercises</u>
Comments or a mini-lecture on "The Spiritual Journey"	Questions and Answers

Rationale/Reflections

These comments would be based on chapter three of this project, ending with the section which began this chapter. Chapters one and two would, of course, serve as background, but need not be made explicit here.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Exercises</u>
Self-Identity	
Character/ Personality	1. Description of me: 10 words or phrases. Rank these. Give them up one by one until there is one. ¹⁴
Body	2. Drawing of me: Using color crayons on large paper. Symbolic

end of this chapter. Authors and titles found in the exercises are either specifically listed or may be found in the three anthologies of short stories listed according to the letter notation ("A," "B," or "C"). Check the Bibliography for authors and titles not in the Resource List.

¹⁴Sam Keen and Anne Valley Fox, Telling Your Own Story (New York: Signet Press, 1974), p. 16.

- or literal, clothed or nude, portrait or full figure. Reflect on what you have drawn.¹⁵
- Place** 3. Draw the floor plan of the house you lived in when you were small. Make it detailed. Take someone on a "tour" of your house, pointing out sounds, smells, etc., as well as positions of things.¹⁶
- Family** 4. Create a living sculpture of your family or pose people in an imaginary family photo using group members. How do their places and positions (especially relative to one another) reflect what life was like for you in your family?¹⁷
- Institutions** 5. School memories: floor plans, teachers, memorable catch phrases, events, grades, etc.¹⁸
6. Work: What did you first get paid to do? How do you feel about work?¹⁹
7. What organizations have you belonged to? Uniforms worn? Pledges taken? Creeds affirmed?²⁰
- Larger Place** 8. Take an imaginary bicycle ride or walk through your home town. What people, places, smells, feelings emerge? Where were you allowed to go? Not go? Are there any aspects of your early environment still important to you?²¹
- Laws and Orders** 9. Write your own set of ten commandments which summarize the messages of childhood regarding correct behavior, taboos, ideals. What kinds of jokes, stories, tales were frequently told (and thus apparently communicated a "lesson")? What feelings about sex did you have from early years?²²

¹⁵Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 54.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., p. 59.

²²Ibid., p. 66.

Legacies

10. What "relics" and "talismans" do you possess from your past? Heirlooms, antiques, jewelry, clothing, books, property, etc. Have these been handed down or invested with value by you only? What about inherited money? Personal qualities, talents, etc., which seem to be inherited? To whom do you anticipate passing which of these along?²³

Role Models

11. What heroes and heroines did you find in books, film, T.V., everyday life? Who have you imitated in dress, speech, etc.?²⁴

12. Meditation to wrap up these exercises (see #1 appendix). Individuals should close their eyes and listen to the meditation as it is read aloud. Then discuss reactions to it in small groups.

Rationale/Reflections

These exercises provide opportunities to get in touch with one's roots, review where one has been, what places, events, accidents of life have shaped personal identity. Each exercise should be done in the dialectic of individual activity, reflection, sharing with the group (telling one's story) and reflection by the group.

Here, again, we recognize the eminently social character of our lives and how "others" have helped/hindered our self-development. The distinction between "my story" and "your story" blurs here, yet it is important to keep focusing on the individual's unique appropriation from the myriad of stimuli in shaping personality.

These exercises thus might provide an opportunity for the leader to make some observations regarding human experience from the first two chapters of this project, emphasizing the creative aspects of each personal event, in deciding, unifying, and synthesizing.

²³Ibid., p. 68.

²⁴Ibid., p. 77.

These aspects of the individual are the intimate boundaries of one's formative years which connect with the ultimate paradoxes which one encounters later.

A meditation by Frank Kimper (see appendix #1) helps sum up this section by affirming that though I am made up of all these aspects of self-identity, I am more than these. This again points toward God's story.

Activity

Exercises

Life Paradoxes

Immaturity/
Maturity

(See Anthology
"A")

1. Read Flannery O'Connor's short story "A Temple of the Holy Ghost." Reflect on the paradox in the story that moves the central character toward maturity. How does this story mesh with my story?

Rationale/Reflections

This story richly tells the experience of a young girl who unconsciously wrestles with the contrast between a view of the body as a "temple of the Holy Ghost" and the spectacle of a hermaphrodite at a circus. This contrast is interwoven in her mind with the hermaphrodite's acceptance of the condition and the girl's own "sass" to her mother. Somehow, this inspires her to move beyond her present "unloveliness" toward adulthood. The story illuminates the movement from body to feelings--two aspects of personality which we discussed in chapter three.

Activity

Exercises

Real/unreal

2. Read The Velveteen Rabbit by Margery Williams (or the excerpt in appendix #2). What is real for you?

Rationale/Reflections

This marvelous story has as its overriding theme love--yet it deals beautifully with the contrast between reality and unreality.

ActivityExercises

Good/evil

3. Jot down answers to these questions: When did you "fall from grace," lose your ease? When do you remember lying? Being ashamed? Hiding? Feeling small and inadequate? When did you discover the limitations in your mother/father? Best friend? A hero/heroine?²⁵

Loss of innocence/
confrontation
with the unknown

4. Read Frank O'Connor's "The Face of Evil." How does the experience of the narrator reflect your own? (See Anthology "A")

Rationale/Reflections

Either of these two exercises may be seen to deal with the problem of evil and personal loss of innocence. The sense of evil as all pervasive is relativised by the simple loss of innocence and the self is once again moved beyond itself to grapple with a world it no longer controls. This parallels the movement from aesthetics to reason which we delineated in chapter three.

ActivityExercises

conflict/victory

(See Anthology
"C")

5. Read Pearl S. Buck's "The Old Demon." Identify some conflict in your own life that you eventually overcame or are trying to overcome. Recall feelings before and after the "Victory."

Rationale/Reflections

Pearl Buck describes an old Chinese villager who has fought all her life with the old demon river--to keep it from flooding village and croplands. The battle is so familiar, it is hardly even a conflict any more. Now suddenly she is faced with a new conflict--the invasion of Japanese soldiers. Her lifetime of struggle in conflict helps her rise to this new challenge though it means

²⁵Ibid., p. 146.

sacrificing her own life. Ironically, the old enemy now becomes ally.

Activity

Growth/
stagnation

Exercises

6. Read Vladimir Nabakov's "Spring in Rialta." Can you identify with the stagnation of the central relationship? What stagnant areas of your life can you identify?

Rationale/Reflections

Nabakov's tale draws the reader into a hit-and-miss relationship that never can grow and flourish. The sadness and regret that result are poignantly described.

Activity

Change/
deterioration

Exercises

7. Read Sholom Aleichem's "Modern Children" (or get together with a group and view the movie "Fiddler on the Roof"). What changes do you resist in your life? Does deterioration lead to new growth or stagnation?

Rationale/Reflections

"Modern Children" reflects the "deterioration" of old values and traditions in the marriage customs of a Jewish family in Russia. With great humor and tenderness Tevye learns to make the changes for the love of his daughter.

Activity

Alienation/
acceptance
despair/hope
doubt/faith

Exercises

8. Get together with a group of people and either see one of the following plays or divide the parts and read through one: "The Glass Menagerie" by Tennessee Williams, "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett, "Death of a Salesman" by Arthur Miller. What despairs, doubts, alienations do you experience in living? Do you find any acceptance, hope or faith?

Rationale/Reflections

The themes of alienation, despair, and doubt are prevalent in modern literature. Often, no hope, acceptance, or faith is attained by characters in these stories--only the absurd longing for grace or salvation. Here the stories of the modern era are most open ended and beg for resolution . . . a resolution that may only be found in God's story.

Activity

Questing and
Journeying

Exercises

1. Make a list of turning points or special events in your life's journey. Then, write or draw your vision of the journey's end. Thirdly, list all activities that you engage in habitually or frequently. Finally, compare the second and third tasks. Where are you now in the Journey? Draw an image. What obstacles are there in the way of reaching the end? Is there a trend or pattern or consistency in your journey?
2. Draw "pictures" of God as perceived when you were: (a) a child, (b) a teenager, (c) an adult, (d) projecting a future image. Share with a small group your drawings.
3. Read James McClendon's Biography as Theology--How Stories Can Remake Today's Theology. Discuss with a small group. Do the lives of King, Jordan, Hammar-skjold, or Ives help bring alive some theologically rich images for you?

Rationale/Reflections

We pick up the journeying and questing aspects of our lives in these exercises.

Americans, especially, seem to be most unconsciously engaged in a quest for holiness/meaning. Stories which

deal quite imaginatively with this theme include: The Lord of the Rings by J. R. R. Tolkein, The Once and Future King by T. H. White, and Sidhartha by Herman Hesse.

The third exercise offers us images of four men and their spiritual journeys in terms of powerful life-defining motifs like suffering, the beloved, the community of love, the incarnated Lord, and the way of transcendence within American revivalism. The four men are Martin Luther King, Jr., Dag Hammarskjold, Clarence Jordan, and Charles Ives.

Your Story

We can in no way be exhaustive in our lists of exercises, paradoxes, stories, and techniques. Nor can we ultimately pursue "my story" without moving into the areas of "your story" and "God's story." Stories, as stories, are communal narratives. We now want to move our focus "from the process (the individual appropriation of a series of images) to the content (the nature of the images themselves). We come to the world of folk tales, fables, and fairytales (Marchen), as well as legends and sagas and, finally, myths."²⁶ In "your story," we want to pursue the sources of the images as they arise in certain "root metaphors" within the culture in which we live, move, and have our our being. We have already had an intimation of this in the paradoxical themes above. These paradoxes give rise to images or metaphors which are cultural yet lie beneath

²⁶Holmes, p. 171.

an individual culture and are thus universal. We will, in fact, find their ultimate resolution in "God's story." It is the universal characteristic of "your story" motifs that makes them most significant as embodying the transcendent. These are the "mundane stories" which mediate between "my story" and the sacred Story of God. The mundane story draws us into the unknown that is open, calling us to the road toward God. "There in a creative imagination we can join our vision of God in Christ to work for the kingdom in love for one another and all humankind. It is the human story, and hence God's Story."²⁷

In the lives of inspiring people like Dag Hammarskjöld, Clarence Jordan, Martin Luther King, Jr., Charles Ives, and many others we see "root metaphors" or religious paradigms acted out in a social drama, especially in times of conflict (which three of these men experienced quite intimately). Thus, we begin this series of activities and exercises with another biography and proceed on an odyssey through various kinds of stories, all of which reflect the height, depth and breadth of our human culture through various "root metaphors." In choosing which of these stories to really give ourselves to, the aesthetic criteria set forth in chapter one are quite useful. But, of

²⁷ Ibid., p. 183.

course, it will be valuable to examine many more than we choose.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Exercises</u>
Biography	1. Read T. S. Eliot's "Murder in the Cathedral." Or, see a production of this magnificent play. Evaluate the "root metaphor" that Thomas a Beckett lived out (martyrdom). (For help in this, refer to <u>Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors</u> by Victor Turner.) Is this a root metaphor for you?

Rationale/Reflections

Biography ties autobiography (the enterprise of "telling my story") with larger stories. We need to pay attention to the ways in which the paradoxes/boundaries of life have gotten worked out before us by learning first to identify them, and then to enact resolutions to them.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Exercise</u>
Fairy Tales	2. Write your own "fairy tale." Let images emerge for your tale and see what develops. 3. Read some fairy tales from Grimm or Lang. Identify themes and motifs and how they are lived out in the lives of characters in the tales. Are you working out these same themes and motifs? For good or ill?

Rationale/Reflections

Fairy tales give the imagination good exercise. Yet they also open the reader to dealing with transcendent problems, dilemmas, conflicts, etc. Two good books to refer to in this connection are Rosemary Haughton's Tales from Eternity, and Maria Louise von Franz's Interpretation of Fairy Tales. Also see, Bruno Bettelheim's The Uses of

Enchantment.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Exercises</u>
Folk Tales	4. Write your own folk tale. E.g., describe a local character in bigger than life images. What folk tales have been formative of your consciousness? Of the American consciousness? Of your ethnic consciousness?
Legends/Sagas	5. It is helpful to identify peculiarly American legends and sagas: e.g., "the old west," pioneer stories, "manifest destiny," "melting pot" stories, the self-made person (man), the honest hero, etc.

Rationale/Reflections

Reading tales about Paul Bunyan or tales from Uncle Remus can put us in touch with the root metaphors or cultural paradigms which impact our lives. Books by Richard M. Dorson are helpful in this area. Social scientists can be particularly insightful also: cf. such books as The Greening of America by Charles Reich, and The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Times of Trial by Robert N. Ballah. Then read the great social novelists like Upton Sinclair or playwrights like Bertolt Brecht.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Exercise</u>
Myths	6. With a group of people, read or act out or watch performances of and debrief one or more of the following myths:
death/eternal life	(a) The Epic of Gilgamesh
creation/fall	(b) The Genesis Myths
quest/return	(c) The Odyssey (Homer)
passion/honor	(d) Parzival (Eschenbach)
love/lust	(e) Tristram and Isolde (Strassburg)

Rationale/Reflections

Some people maintain that Americans have few, none, or dying myths. Here we want to investigate stories which

are most self-consciously universal and attempt to establish meaning most profoundly. Here we again approach "God's story"--yet we recognize the human made resolutions to the great paradoxical questions of existence and are often not satisfied.

It seems valuable to me to pay attention to myths because they put us in touch with the wisdom of our species. Myths are stories which have persisted for a great length of time and in fact appear in various forms around the world in widely divergent cultures. We intuitively recognize the awesome dimensions of myth when we allow the stories to impact us, for they deal with all the paradoxes (and more) that we have already identified. Life in its multidimensional facets of tragedy and triumph, joy and sadness, freedom and bondage (etc., etc.) is boldly set forth in myth and somehow dealt with in resolution.

For those who pay attention, myth establishes a world in which we can live--if not blissfully, at least harmoniously. Yet, we may not carelessly choose any myth to pay attention to. Resolutions offered may clash or create dissonance. A group of Christians engaged in the spiritual journey will want to carefully investigate the mythical resolution to see if it coincides with the path they are seeking. This may be especially obvious when one compares Western myths to Eastern myths (though not necessarily so). Yet, even within our own tradition there will be dissonant voices that must be recognized before they can be creatively synthesized, or sagely rejected.

The point may be demonstrated by looking at one of the myths I have chosen . . . Homer's Odyssey. Odysseus is already on a journey. The Illiad partly describes that initial part of the journey, the process (as John Dunne interprets the tale) of "bringing lifetime to mind." The struggle with a great task can relativize a person's life,

dilate the present so to speak by putting all one's life into relationship with that event (in this case, the conquering of Troy). What often happens (especially in a heroic epic) is that "deathtime is brought to mind." That is, the extreme boundaries of life are encountered, and found to be unbreachable. For Odysseus, this realization comes in the deaths of his dearest companions. Such a realization is itself a process of dying. The question is: can Odysseus return to "lifetime"? Thus, the Odyssey traces his voyages with twelve ships as they wander "homeward." The voyage takes ten years. The most beguiling obstacles are set before him by the gods, two of which are particularly interesting. One obstacle occurs in the land of the Lotus Eaters, where the crew and Odysseus are tempted by the hallucinogenic drug of "forgetfulness" and set floating on a sea of dream. Another long encounter with an obstacle is on the island of Calypso where Odysseus remains for eight years in blissful existence. Here, especially, the tale might have ended, with Odysseus' absorption into a state of restful happiness forever. But then, it would not be the sort of myth we would want to pay attention to as Christians. For, as Joseph Campbell puts it,

. . . . here . . . is our clue to the method of the adventure, if one is ever to return home. It is this: not to identify one's self with any of the figures or powers experienced. The Indian yogi, striving for release, identifies himself with the light, and never returns. But no one with a will to the service of others and of life would permit himself such an escape. The ultimate aim of the quest, if one is to return, must be neither release nor ecstasy for oneself, but the wisdom and power to serve others.²⁸

So Homer completes the tale with the story of Odysseus' eventual return to his wife and home and the service he

²⁸ Joseph Campbell, Myths to Live By (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), p. 234.

subsequently performs for them.

Each of the myths I have chosen (and there are hundreds of others) has the theme of quest and return. Though the paradox that spawns the quest and the significant encounters of the quest may all vary, the need to return to a life among people is a constant theme. For, the resolution of the paradox encountered in the story would not be significant if it could not somehow be lived.

Again, because myths deal with paradoxes that individuals face, no matter how unconsciously, they are significant. In fact, they form the "collective unconscious" of humankind (C. G. Jung). Thus, allowing myths to impact us may facilitate the emergence of unconscious struggles, making them easier to deal with. This process is another self-transcending one. By engaging imaginatively in the drama of myths that portray our psychic struggles, a cathartic healing process may occur which resolves formerly hidden conflicts. Myths release human potential in this way. Yet, is that all there is to the process?

God's Story

Robert Cooper points out ". . . that phrases or lines of poems can be used as lures. They can show me how I might feel, and in showing me possible feelings they show me possible beings, possible actions."²⁹ We tell stories precisely for this reason. For me, the inevitable question remains: What is the source of the best stories? Is it the human psyche? Are compelling myths the result of accumulated human brilliance? Certainly human

²⁹Robert Cooper, "God as Poet and Persons at Prayer," in Cargas and Lee, p. 416.

brilliance as well as fallibility plays its part. But as Cooper asserts, from a Christian standpoint God is understood as the poet of the universe . . . the One who has a vision. "It is God who sees the best configuration of things both in the world of actual entities and in the realm of eternal objects."³⁰ That is, God is the author who creatively offers up to each developing/becoming occasion the most delectable combination of accepted past and novel future. Whether that is the selection chosen or not is up to the actual entity. But this is precisely our reason for pursuing the spiritual journey--to discover what God calls us to choose.

Here we would do well to refer again to our discussion of revelation in chapter two. The stories we tell and live out (consciously or unconsciously) in combinations of "my story" and "your story" can too easily become closed, static, unimaginative, and stifling. Though the activities and exercises we have cited aim toward continual self-transcendence, we believe that what individuals may ultimately accomplish on their own will fall short of the ultimate meaning we seek. Thus, we introduced the category of myth again to further encourage us on the journey, for in myth we seem most obviously (certainly not exclusively) to approach God's story.

³⁰Ibid., p. 415.

What kind of stories, then, are left to tell? After all, God's story is told through "my story" and "your story." Yet the haunting lyric, the lilting harmony of the gospel suggests a difference, a distinction, a destiny not fully manifest here and now. What we need are stories that turn our attention toward the Song of Songs, the Voice under all Silence. Let those who have ears to hear, hear, and those who have eyes to see, see! What's needed is a change of heart, and God's story begins to come into focus. We may tell all the stories we want, but God's action in them all will remain quite opaque until we are given eyes to see. Thus activities and exercises now offered begin with stories of conversion. Then with eyes wide open, we proceed to stories in the tradition of Jesus, ending with some stories for reaching specifically to God.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Exercises</u>
Conversion	1. Read one or more of the following:
Biblical	(a) Moses' encounter with God (see appendix #3).
	(b) Possible "turning points" in the Life of Jesus (see appendix #4).
Monastic	(c) <u>The Seven Storey Mountain</u> by Thomas Merton.
Theologian	(d) The conversion of St. Augustine.
Secular	(e) <u>The Middle Years</u> by Henry James.
	(f) <u>Felix Holt</u> by George Eliot.
	(g) <u>The Sanatorium</u> by Somerset Maugham

ActivityExercises

- (h) Emma by Jane Austen.
- (i) Doctor Zhivago by Boris Pasternak.
- (j) The Last Enemy by Richard Hillary.

Reflect on the dimensions of conversion stories (see appendix #5). Are these dimensions all present in these stories? Compare and contrast them.

Rationale/Reflections

Each of these stories presents excellent examples of change of heart. "The occurrence of faith as the entrance into a new life is not confined to the explicitly religious sphere, nor to certain unusual people."³¹

. . . [T]he followers of Christ bent their efforts not to persuading people of a new philosophy, or introducing them to a mysterious knowledge, but to confronting them with a decision and helping--almost coercing them to make the decision of faith in Christ which was the gateway to life in him. . . .³²

Nevertheless, as we have talked about faith in this project, we can see that Jesus need not exclusively be the focus of faith. The thing to note here is how faith occurs through conversion, affecting the entire way one perceives life.

ActivityExercises

Personal

- 2. Write a conversion experience of your own. Which dimensions of conversion are present in your story?

Rationale/Reflections

Careful attention should be devoted to a comparison of life-defining themes/images in the Gospel narratives about Jesus and one's own life-defining themes/images as

³¹Rosemary Haughton, Act of Love (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1968), p. 97.

³²Ibid., p. 72.

the result of conversion. The next set of exercises is designed to help in that process.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Exercises</u>
Jesus	1. Picture yourself engaged in an activity that you normally frequently engage in. Suddenly you hear a voice calling, and looking around you see a "window" into another world, in which stands a blurred figure who calls. You contemplate this call for a moment. What is being said or somehow communicated to you? You decide to step through the window and suddenly the world behind becomes blurred and the one you enter comes sharply into focus. Who is the person who has called you? What does he/she look like? Where are you? Is the call now clearer? What is the message of the caller? Can you respond? What do you do? Now, either return to where you started, or stay where you are and open your eyes. . . . Debrief the experience with a group.

Rationale/Reflections

The purpose of this section of exercises is to discover meaningful images of the central figure of Christian faith, for us personally. This first exercise is best done in a group with a leader "guiding" the fantasy. Debriefing is important. For some excellent advice on doing guided imagery meditation, see Opening to God by Carolyn Stahl.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Exercises</u>
	2. Read <u>The Magus</u> by John Fowles. Then read the apothegm (Bultmann) or paradigm (Dibelius) or pronouncement story (Vincent Taylor) on tribute to Caesar (Mark 12.13-17//Matthew 22.15-22//Luke 20.20-26). Consider the image (suggested by Robert Funk) of Jesus as Magician.

ActivityExercises

3. Read Henry David Thoreau's essay on "Walking." Read one of the synoptic Gospels. Consider another image (suggested by Funk) of Jesus as Saunterer.

Rationale/Reflections

The second and third exercises are based on a book by Robert Funk entitled Jesus as Precursor. These images are worth exploring in this section. But first, we may list at least three other images of Jesus suggested by Frederick Buchner: Jesus as Convicter, Jesus as Comedian or Fool, and Jesus as the Teller of Fairy Tales. Each of these images (including Magician and Saunterer) complements and merge into one another and help me to get hold of who Jesus was and is as Christ. Here I will treat two.

Reading The Magus sets the stage for a consideration of Jesus as Magician. The central character, Nicholas Urfe, begins to explore the road to mystery, yet inevitably misses the point for he can find no meaning in magic. He looks for truth beyond magic and is frustrated, for he never perceives that the truth beyond magic is--more magic. Confronted with this truth in a fairytale (see appendix #6) he finds in a cave, he cannot accept it. "Instead, he insisted on reading the drama as a detective story, one containing a mystery that could be solved, resolved, profaned, by digging out the facts, driving behind appearances, ripping off masks."³³ To be sure, he perceived the mystery but refused to accept his limitations for breaching it.

So it is with many of us today who approach Jesus and become bewildered and frustrated that he had so little to say by way of explicit direction for getting on in the

³³Robert Funk, Jesus as Precursor (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 79.

world. We are like Urfe or the Pharisees of Jesus' own day--sure that life can be easily systematized, stuffed into a box and conveniently poured out for breakfast each morning. We therefore address specific questions to Jesus --e.g., "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them or should we not?"

Of course the question is serious, yet it may be asked in order to trap as much as to find a way. The trap set by the Pharisees is for Jesus himself. The trap set by us is for "right behavior" once and for all. Jesus avoids both traps by an apparently ambiguous answer. Is he thus saying, "You have to decide for yourself"? Funk believes not. Instead he invites us to pay attention to two points.

First, Jesus' reply is in no way straightforward or unequivocal. Why?

Second, he answers the question only after first calling for a coin from the audience. Why?

The first point causes us to question Jesus' integrity. Yet, we see by the question, "Why put me to the test?" that Jesus is quite aware that self-incrimination is the trap he has been asked to step into. An unequivocal answer will spring the trap also. But the answer accompanied by the "demonstration" (as if by an amateur magician calling for a coin to perform magic with), subverts the question--it ostensibly "answers" it, yet calls attention to its weakness as a proper question. In holding up the coin, Jesus asks, "Whose picture is that?" Somebody blurts out "Caesar's!" "Well, well. Imagine that," concludes Jesus, and pockets the coin. Whereupon, the audience--"apart from the dense and literal minded"--could laugh at the irony of this "wise man" who gives such a simple, glib answer. In a sense, Jesus has belittled the question. It's obvious in the coin: this makes its own claims and they are neither ironic nor metaphoric. "The little scene

is ironic in order to suggest that the real question has to do not with the rights of Caesar, but with the jurisdiction of God."³⁴

If the Pharisees didn't "get it" in the coin demonstration, Jesus follows up with the beguilingly simple answer: "All you have to do . . . is determine what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God."³⁵ Thus, Jesus' comment on the burning issue of his day (Roman oppression and Jewish enslavement, i.e., "the state") is best gleaned from the fact that he said only this. That very important comment "is that the questions of Caesar and God are really incommensurate. The kingdom about which Jesus speaks is the reign of God. On that horizon, the claims of Caesar are marginal, scarcely worth noticing at all."³⁶

With the word horizon, we may get in touch both with Jesus as Magician and Jesus as Saunterer. "Jesus was certainly a word magician. He intended to create a world as real as, but other than, the world that was. . . ."³⁷ He did this by breaching the limits, the boundaries, of the story we are in and pointing to another horizon. Yet this horizon itself is limit--the limits of the explicit.³⁸ Thus, it cannot be carefully described and captured within the world we are invited to leave.

Jesus, it is said, came proclaiming the reign of God. The reign to which his words pointed was not accompanied by observable signs. People could not say, "There it is!" or "Here it is!" (Luke 17.20). Those about him, though craning their necks, could not see what he was talking about. Because they could not see it, they were inclined to think the reign to which he pointed was unreal. They did not know and could not guess that they were under the spell of another horizon. However, the poor and the destitute, the tax collectors and prostitutes saw it, and rejoiced. For them, Jesus' magic was stronger than the magic of habituated sensibility.³⁹

³⁴Ibid., p. 85.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., p. 91.

³⁸Ibid., p. 86.

³⁹Ibid., p. 89.

Jesus beckons us to walk with him toward that new horizon. This is not a walk for exercise, as Thoreau points out, but a walk for freedom and wildness. In walking Thoreau "perceived the internal relation between and among sauntering, the sacred, and the senses. . . ." ⁴⁰ The term sauntering, instructs Thoreau, is rooted in those idlers who roamed about Europe in the Middle Ages begging alms so that they might go á la sainte Terre, to the Holy Land.

So it is in sauntering that Thoreau discovers the art of discerning "realities only." And in this sense, certainly, we may understand Jesus as the "man ready for a walk, who was, indeed, already sauntering along toward Jerusalem, the Holy City." ⁴¹

Activity

Exercises

Parables

Preparation

1. Read Carlos Castenada's books on his relationship with don Juan. Read Franz Kafka's The Castle or Parables and Paradoxes. Read Friedrich Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra. How do these stories "subvert" the world as you know it (or think you know it)?

Rationale/Reflections

I suggest these books as preparation for "thinking parabolically." The theme of "yonder horizon" is picked up in these stories in the sense of great need to move "away from here." These authors especially feel the passionate agony of the knowledge that what appears to be real, is not really real. Through them, we may learn to step into the breach they perceive between a host of human pre-somptions about reality and the truly real. Thus, we

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 98.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 99.

find it valuable to expose ourselves to these stories.

Activities

Kingdom

Exercises

2. Read the Parable of Leavened Bread (Matthew 13.33//Luke 13.20), and the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4.30-32). What do they say? I.e., how do they subvert the world?
3. Read some modern parables by Jorge Borges (e.g., "The Gospel According to Mark" or "The Garden of Forking Paths").
4. Write a parable of your own.

Rationale/Reflections

"Thinking parabolically" means learning how to live beyond the present as I constitute it for myself, or beyond the past which constitutes the present for me; toward God. It means opening myself to being co-constituted by God and thus participating in the serendipitous reign of God where new life--creative novelty--gracefully characterizes all activity. Parables serve to explode old myths and conceptions and impel us into the realm of God's reign. The Parable of the Leaven is a good example. Short and succinct, it hardly seems a story worth paying attention to. Yet, if we allow its parabolic meaning to explode in us, a richness of novelty guides us to new horizons.

The problem, as Funk points out, is that we have so much sedimentation of interpretation to blast through to let the truly parabolic nature of the sentence speak to us.

. . . [F]ew literary compendia in the Western tradition have been so completely washed clean of resonances by the waters of common repetition and interpretation [as the Bible]. Is it possible to restore some of those resonances or cart away some of that debris?⁴²

Funk suggests two steps in a methodology: (1)

⁴²Ibid., p. 52.

Immerse oneself in the primary literature, read parables of all kinds, read texts on the subject matter of the parable (e.g., leaven, baking, etc.). "The object will be to reacclimate oneself to the sedimented tradition of that time and place, with a view to "listening in" on the lost resonances of our text."⁴³ (2) Scan the secondary literature for items which are there which get only cursory attention, especially when they seem not to converge with the "interpretation" given of the text.

Investigating this parable leads to several interesting aspects of the pericope which may yield to us its parabolic meaning. (a) What can possibly be meant by "hid"? Why would a word normally used to convey nuances of "conceal," "secret," "cover" be used as a baking technique? This reminds us of other contexts in which Jesus uses the word hidden in reference to the kingdom. Is hiddenness of the essence of the kingdom? (b) Three measures of meal is a lot of meal! It is a huge amount: enough, perhaps, to make bread for a hundred persons. This indicates preparations for a festive occasion, a giant party. Here we may touch the comic which we may usually expect in Jesus (if we know him parabolically). Imagine a woman kneading all that dough! Yet, this is what God expects. Compare the preparations Sarah is asked to make for the visit of Yahweh to Abraham at Mamre in the form of three men (Genesis 18). "Three measures of fine meal" is to be used to make cakes. This is apparently the amount suitable for an epiphany.

(c) The horizon of the hearer may now have shifted from seeing an everyday activity to envisioning the epiphany of God. However, our sensibility is now in for another shock. For leaven generally symbolizes in the Old Testament a corrupting agent (e.g., Exodus 12.17-20).

⁴³Ibid., p. 59.

Even in the New Testament, this understanding was pervasive (cf. I Corinthians 5.6-8). Why here do we find the juxtaposition of leaven and the holy? It is perhaps because we must understand the parable as an attack which inverts the symbol of unleavened: "the kingdom arrives as a negation of the established temple and cult and replaces them with a sacrament of its own--a new and leavened bread."⁴⁴

Activity

Fantasy

(See Anthology
"B")

Exercises

5. Read the following:
 - (a) "The Judgement" by Franz Kafka
 - (b) "A Common Confusion" by Franz Kafka
 - (c) "Cockroaches" by Bruno Schultz
 - (d) "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" by Jorge Luis Borges
 - (e) "There Is No Such Place as America" by Peter Bichsel
 - (f) "The Zebra Storyteller" by Spencer Holst

Rationale/Reflections

In his introduction to Fantastic Worlds, Myths, and Stories, Eric Rabkin asserts that the "continuous use of reversal is at the heart of fantastic literature."⁴⁵ I believe fantasy literature is today one of our best guides to thinking parabolically. A fantastic story will be important in the measure that it engages in concerns of the world and persons. Yet, far from offering escape, a fantastic world at its best offers handles that allow for relativizing of fears, clarification of confusion and thus liberation. The fantastic is fantastic not because it

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 63

⁴⁵Eric Rabkin, Fantastic Worlds (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 12.

simply violates some of the rules of everyday existence, but because it reverses the ground rules we are following and thus offers an alternative to the "real world."

Though modern fantasy often lacks an underlying faith stance, it can be useful for propelling us beyond ourselves in the search for meaning, as we seek to keep up with that sauntering child of God both within us and in the figure of Jesus.

Activity

Addressing God

Exercises

1. Read the story of Elijah's translation (see appendix #7). This is a good story to have read aloud because it has a repetitive rhythm. The leader might then lead a guided fantasy: Imagine you are climbing a mountain path (or following a path anywhere). Finally, you come to a shrine or altar. There you are presented with a gift. You are told that you must give up everything you have for this gift. What do you do? Return along the path. Open your eyes and debrief.

2. Any of the guided imagery meditations in Carolyn Stahl's book Opening to God, are tremendously helpful.

Rationale/Reflections

We need to develop our dialogue with God ourselves. We need to learn to approach God intentionally and imaginatively. The stories of the Hebrew prophets are excellent stories for doing this, for they provide a basis upon which we may come also before God. There we will ultimately become dumb and silent, knowing only that God is God.

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Chapter 5

RELEVANCE FOR THE LOCAL PARISH

Some Sociological Ramifications of
Story/Storytelling

In my various capacities as a worker in the church, I have often felt frustrated with the level of theological expertise displayed by most lay persons. Theology apparently is deemed too irrelevant to garner much attention from the average church member. On the other hand, the spiritual quest preoccupies the thoughts and energy of many devout Christians who seek to live out their faith honestly. This old incongruence between theology and spirituality is what set me on a search for an appropriate medium to bridge the gap. I believe story/storytelling is that medium. Within the medium of story/storytelling, reason and faith may be creatively conjoined. Michael Novak points out,

What we need today, most earnestly, is a way of imagining intelligence that is not objectifying, manipulative, alienating; a way of feeling within oneself the coursing of one's blood, the aliveness of one's nerves, the power of one's passions, the labyrinthine intricacies of one's perceptions--and still of acting intelligently. We need models of passionate intelligence, intelligent passion.¹

It is exactly in the local parish that a process

¹Michael Novak, Ascent of the Mountain, Flight of the Dove (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), pp. 85-86.

of passionate intelligence, intelligent passion can take place. Human beings naturally come to understandings of themselves and their world within social institutions. Institutions provide the mediating structure between inner and outer stories. What society in effect does is to select from myriads of possibilities specific concrete actions to pursue. If each individual had to do this for him/herself, freedom would be nonexistent. Selection is not contrary to freedom, necessarily. As it is, every human being's actions spring from many sources, all of which by their very nature are social in origin (see chapter one). To be "free" of one's society totally would be to exist in a chaotic, formless, void.

Today we exist within a terrific complex of social institutions, all of which communicate to individuals how they ought to act, think, and live. If one's own sense of reality, stories, and symbols is not reflected in any single institution, one is somewhat rootless. Nor can one have any profound impact in criticizing or directing the moral shape of institutions. Yet, one cannot escape social institutions. The result is often schizophrenia, alienation, anomie, and apathy.

This seems especially acute in American society. The individual is often pitted antagonistically against social institutions (and thus other concrete individuals) on the basis of our value of "individual autonomy." The

"system" (whether government, church, educational, etc.) thus allows us "private space" within which to formulate our own sense of reality, stories, and symbols, yet seems to roll on and "over" us because we then have no serious impact on its own sense of reality, stories, and symbols. Nor is it socially acceptable to challenge (or politely discuss!) serious values divisions between individual Americans for that's "their own private business." "But if a person cannot engage another on that turf, how can either be genuinely 'present' to the other?"²

In such a situation it is not surprising that Americans are at odds with their institutions, and consequently at odds with reality. We neglect the cardinal principle of life itself in our symbols of the "free market place" of ethical laissez-faire. The basis of all human institutions--trust--begins to erode. The shared values that uphold a society no longer are shared or discussed but simply bandied about in a saddening swirl of crescendoing cacophonies.

With Novak, we reassert that,

Each person needs a selector to break down the overwhelming floods of human experience into a livable sense of reality; a way of relating self to past and future, as well as to the past and future of the race; and sets of images to focus one's revulsions, goals, aspirations, perplexities, loves, hates, actions.³

In other words, we need loving institutions which will

²Ibid., p. 135.

³Ibid., p. 140.

integrate our lives and send us forth to fulfill meaningful destinies. I can think of no better institution for this task than the local church, and no better method than story/storytelling.

It is in the local church that trust and sharing should be at their optimum. It is in the concreteness of parish life that we are rooted to an ancient tradition of relational meanings. It is in the church that "my story" and "God's story" are conjoined in "your story" in hope for a newness and fullness of life.

Stephen Crites points out that today we often retreat from story in two ways: (1) The strategy of abstraction. Images and qualities are detached from experience to become data for the formation of generalized principles and techniques. This is useful for conducting practical affairs of life in our society. In its more elaborate forms, this strategy of abstraction provides the basis for science and technology. (2) The strategy of contraction. Narrative temporality again is fragmented, but this time in order to give very specific attention to each or a particular immediacy, an image isolated from the image stream. Here the focus is on isolated sensation and feeling.

Of course, the abstracting from experience (which leads us to posit a mind) and the contracting from experience (which leads us to posit a body possessing sensations and feelings) are useful. But in our culture they often

play violently against one another. We value the explanation, manipulation, and control of the former (#1) and detest the sensational, pleasurable, sexual of the latter (#2), or vice versa. We may try to put the two together, but it always seems artificial, since neither extremes are based on unitary experience, narratively conceived.

One effect of abstraction has been to kill modern metaphysics with controversies between dualistic, materialistic and idealistic theories. On a more practical level, this has meant the entrapment of educated subcultures in their own abstract constructions and violent backlashes against this which leads contractionists to withdraw into subjective immediacy. Either extreme is antirational, antiwholistic, and unreal.

Perhaps in the local parish with its Judeo-Christian heritage, we can rediscover the truth that,

The self is not a composite of mind and body. The self in its concreteness is indivisible, temporal, and whole, as it is revealed to be in the narrative quality of its experience. Neither disembodied minds, nor mindless bodies can appear in stories. There the self is given as whole, as an activity in time.⁴

Actions undertaken from an intentional storytelling community will have an ethical authority because founded in a common narrative coherence of life, not in the "naked show

⁴Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," Journal of the American Academy of Religion, XXXIX, 3 (September 1971), 309.

of force exercised either in the name of reason or in the name of glandular vitality."⁵

Thus, in the local parish we need, more than ever, to tell stories and listen to stories. "So long as the story retains its primary hold on the imagination, the play of immediacy and the illuminating power of abstraction remain in positive tension."⁶ In story we may pursue the most real--though it seems ever so impossible, so silent, so beyond our power to control or grasp.

To those who might balk at what often is considered a waste of time or just for children, we cite Dale Wasserman's Man of La Mancha.⁷ Here the so-called illusion becomes the most real thing in the lives of several people. We are in effect invited to follow a madman! Cervantes originally ridiculed Don Quixote for being out of step with the world. But Wasserman turns the tables, chastising the world for being out of step with the ideal which Don Quixote comically yet earnestly lives out. The hoped for ideal replaces the "reality" of the concrete and impractical. This quest for an impossible dream is not sentimental idealism, but a highly realistic life-changing adventure "deep into the mysteries of reality where facts and fantasies enrich each other in the excitement of

⁵Ibid., p. 310.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Dale Wasserman and Joe Darion, Man of La Mancha (New York: Random, 1966).

conflict and triumph."⁸

Out of story/storytelling so conceived comes specific concrete action--the basis for a lifestyle that is intentional, Christian, and committed. What is needed is "revolution" in the form of a new or newly appropriated sacred story. Such a story

. . . establishes on a new basis the coherency of social and personal time. It makes it possible to recover a living past, to believe again in the future, to perform acts that have significance for the person who acts. By doing so it restores a human form of experience.⁹

Here we return once again to our initial chapter and reassert that what we must be about is the constructing/appropriating/living-out of believable models. How are we to judge one model over against another? First, it is helpful to recognize a continuum of propositions or models: from insignificant to significant. The more insignificant a proposition, the easier it is to establish, at least when it is false. For instance, the statement, "It is raining," may easily be established as true or false by observation. Thus, an alternative proposition, "It is not raining," can be easily compared and evaluated as being (or not being) better. Without getting into linguistic analysis, it should be noted that even these simple statements

⁸Robert Roth, Story and Reality (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), p. 161.

⁹Crites, p. 311.

are based upon theories or interpretive schemes (e.g., what constitutes "raining"). This does not mean our models are simply irrationally arbitrary. An irrational faith is inhuman. In deciding questions of interpretation, our faculty of reasoning is important. "Descriptions of nature are human constructions but nature is such as to bear description in some ways and not others."¹⁰

On a more significant level, models are embraced and valuable not so much for specific purposes (i.e., to get us from here to there), but to qualify our entire existence meaningfully. The most significant models are religious models because they attempt to include all of reality and acknowledge a transcendent aspect of reality. They are called "life-defining." Again, reasoning is crucial for evaluating life-defining models--a process of reasoning and valuing cognition and affectivity in which aesthetic criteria are the most appropriate norms for evaluating such models (see chapter one).

Storytelling Praxis

The concept of "praxis" from liberation theologians appears quite relevant for constructing/appropriating/

¹⁰Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith, "Modeling in Religious Education," Religious Education, LXXI (March-April 1976), 119, quoting Ian Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 37.

living-out believable models, especially in light of the last aesthetic criterion, "fruitfulness for our lives." In praxis, one pays attention to the context in which we exist and that shapes our existence. One sees the Christian community as a pilgrim people in whose present is embodied the past of our forefathers and foremothers and the seeds of our future. "The memory of that past, congealed in our symbols, rituals, stories, understandings and insights must be remembered and constantly made present."¹¹ Yet, this past points to a vision of the future--of shalom, of the kingdom of God. "It is in our present that we must critically appropriate our past story and as God continues to interact with us in history, we must live lives that are both faithful to the Story and creative of the vision."¹²

Liberation theologians have felt the dramatic need to very precisely analyze our context and thus set the stage for a shift from concentration on content and reflection to concentration on situation ("place") and action. In praxis we involve ourselves in a revolutionary kind of storytelling. It is revolutionary because it has opened up the past, present and future and discovered a staggering discrepancy between God's demands in our Judeo-Christian

¹¹Thomas Groome, "A Task of Present Dialectical Hermeneutics," Living Light, XIV (Fall 1977), 414.

¹²Ibid., p. 415.

tradition (specifically scripture), our hope and vision for the kingdom of God (or even "secular" utopianism) and the present reality of social injustice, economic oppression, political opportunism, racism, sexism, starvation and hunger. Can the church as the community of God's people be quiet in such a situation? As Martin Marty and Dean Peerman remind us,

The theological community has had to take risks and speak of revolution. The theologians live in a world wherein, as Robert McAfee Brown put it, people live who hold four aces and are not asking for a new deal. In that world of abundance, most are hungry; in that world of affluence, most are unsheltered; in that world of technological mastery, few live by promise or share hope; in that world of potency, few have freedom.¹³

If we understand our God to be the God of the powerless, the homeless, the widow, the orphan, the poor and the oppressed, who brings a new day to the earth in which the wicked oppressing are punished, what can we say to a complacent and corrupt church?

Truly we live in a global village. The sociological and economic and political analyses of third world theologians have ramifications for us, for we profoundly affect third world peoples in acute ways. In addition, we must investigate our own duplicity, our own failures and triumphs in living out the Christian Story. That Story

¹³J. C. Wynn, Christian Education for Liberation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977), p. 39, quoting Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (eds.) New Theology No. 6 (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

affirms our connectedness with the whole of the universe-- a valuable, joyful, creative event which we effect in myriad and ultimate ways (as it impacts us) for good or ill. It affirms the unity of experience, and thus the importance of context in our lives. And, it affirms the necessity of God--as Lover/Lurer--a deity active in history, working aesthetically to transform history and include us in the aesthetic ideal, if we will only allow it through repentance/conversion and discipleship.

With this in mind we may proceed to an explanation of a methodology which shows the relevance of story/story-telling for Christian praxis, and vice versa. The touchstone for the models which we develop in this process of praxis is a person--Jesus Christ. It becomes readily apparent that we commit ourselves to the action of reconstructing our models (and thus transforming our world). For surely the models affect us (whether we are aware of them or not, intentional about them or not), making it more or less difficult to love, to repent, to serve.

We propose that for building adequate models, we develop a storytelling praxis. As we have said repeatedly throughout this project, storytelling "is an ancient and altogether human method. The human being alone among the creatures on the earth is a storytelling animal: sees the present rising out of a past, heading into a future;

perceives reality in a narrative form."¹⁴ Story is uniquely suited to a world consciously and unconsciously perceived as processive in nature--with all the contradictions, complexities, simplifications, intensities, harmonies, which coexist in tensions which are more or less beautiful. These are expressed in stories in ways which can be grasped by more of a person than his or her cognitive sensibility--and thus may become organic to the person; an integral part of the individual's perceptions and actions, his or her model of reality.

First, a storytelling praxis will be dramatic.

"The fact is, our children, our young people, our adults need not so much to hear the Christian life described again as to see it lived!"¹⁵

Second, our storytelling praxis must use analogies in relationships.

Jesus used this method so frequently that a host of examples spring to mind: the kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed; he compares himself to a door; he makes an epigram from the one who hears the word, likening him/her to one who builds a house on a rock foundation. There is no avoiding these analogies because they are necessary to meaning and communication.¹⁶

Third, our personal relationships are crucial for a storytelling praxis. As Luther Woodward says, children

¹⁴Michael Novak, "Story and Experience," in James B. Wiggins (ed.) Religion as Story (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 175.

¹⁵Wynn, p. 80.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 83.

"grow up morally and socially by having a pleasant, satisfying experience with someone whom they love and trust.

. . ." Story is not only about someone, it is told by someone who makes it come alive in the present.

Fourth, storytelling praxis is a socialization process. Everyone is an evangelist, a disciple of Christ whose devotion and commitment to an appropriate model should be made explicit constantly. Each of the members of the community has explicit talents which have developed within an autobiographical story and can be told for the edification of the rest of the community. Likewise, that community is a living story itself, in which members assume roles, etc., that communicate morals, beliefs, and faith.

Fifth, storytelling praxis can assume a number of forms to deal with different needs. Maria Harris points out five: (1) Myth establishes model, (2) apologue defends model, (3) narrative investigates model, (4) satire attacks or criticizes model, (5) parable "subverts" model, exploding old perceptions, expanding one's perspective.¹⁷

Certainly, a storytelling praxis doesn't come easily--it is a skill which must be carefully developed. But it is a tremendously useful and rich method for constructing/appropriating/living-out adequate religious

¹⁷ Maria Harris, "From Myth to Parable: Language and Religious Education," Religious Education, LXXIII, 4 (July-August 1978), 387-398.

models.

We see that a storytelling praxis takes place within a dialectic (as David and Margaret Steward¹⁸ have put it) of remembering/listening. In remembering we re-connect with our roots, remember how God has appeared in our midst and provided meaning in the past. Remembering is acknowledging our "embedment" in a specific place and time with all the richness that "place" and "time" may hold for a people. Remembering is realizing the impact this place and time continues to have upon us now. Remembering is taking seriously what we have said above regarding the unitary nature of our experience.

Listening is connecting ourselves with the vision, with God's novel lure and new possibility. Listening is creating a new place--transforming the old by giving new meaning gleaned from an openness to the unknown, God's revelation. Listening is critically appropriating what has been remembered to enhance and modify its impact on the present.

Another way to state the dialectic is that our model falls between the originating Christ event and the eschatology as understood by a group continually engaging in a storytelling praxis. An explicit five-step procedure

¹⁸David S. Steward and Margaret Steward, "Action-Reflection-Action: Our Embedment in the World," in Maria Harris (ed.) Parish Religious Education (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

for a storytelling praxis is provided by Tom Groome:

1. Present Action: Focus the group's attention on present activity in response to an initial focusing question (e.g., "What does Eucharist mean to you?").

2. Stories and Visions of Participants: Why do you do what you do? Biographical and social genesis of participant's present action. What are future consequences?

3. Christian Community--Story and Vision: Retelling the Christian community story (in regard to the focus of the group) and adding an envisionment of the meaning of this story in the light of God's kingdom.

4. Dialectical Hermeneutic between the Story and Participant's Stories: What does the community's story say to (affirm, deny, call beyond) the participant's story?

5. Dialectical Hermeneutic between the Vision and Participant's Visions: How is my present action creative or non-creative of the Vision, and how will I act in the future? Here stories are very important as they influence concrete action.¹⁹

This model is congruent with the "workshop" developed in chapter four but emphasizes action in the world. It would be an appropriate process to engage in after doing the "workshop."

The model arising out of such a storytelling praxis will promote communion (Durka and Smith). Nothing exists in isolation; nor is human encounter without a dimension which calls us beyond ourselves. Communion connotes creative possibility. We may find and know ourselves as living in and of an environment of love--The Reality of God. Storytelling praxis will keep us searching and working in the present, with due respect for the past and hopefulness

¹⁹Groome, pp. 421-422.

for the future. It will depend on the particular history of our setting and community. It will cause us to raise questions in the broadest and most specific ways. It should empower (and in fact demand) new forms or structures, new times, and new techniques, goals, and objectives. It will call for making explicit the real vision of the parish as a shared endeavor in need of constant renewal as we commit ourselves to an ever more adequate model of the church, humankind, God, and the world.

For a church to be constantly self-conscious (i.e., intentional) and yet natural and spontaneous in a storytelling praxis is the ideal. In many ways, this will not be different from parish life in the past. We have in many ways encouraged people to adopt images of God which were ever more inclusive of contradictions, of new suggestions, of new areas for growth. But we have often failed to develop this. Many times, as youth get older and can grasp more contradictions and anticipate better models for growth, we have failed to respond. "There is evil, yet God is Good?" "We have sinned yet are forgiven?" "Christ overcame sin yet there is still sin?" "God has acted in history once and for all in Jesus of Nazareth yet is still acting in history through Jesus Christ?" "God demands my obedience, yet I don't understand God's will for me." "The spirit is present where two or more are gathered yet it blows coldly sometimes and I am lost and dispirited." "God

is loving and just, yet there exist injustice and hatred?"

Certainly the church has developed tremendous images to help with these questions and statements. From that of Omnipotent and Commanding Judge to meek and gentle baby in a manger, the church has inspired people as diverse as Martin Luther King, Jr., Camillo Torres, Thomas Merton, Sister Theresa of Calcutta, Clarence Jordan, Dag Hammarskjöld. . . . We can be proud of that. But we must be ashamed of forgetting what we are about as a church--a socializing entity. Sociologists have conjectured that student protest, racial protest, peace marches, and other actions for justice arose in the '60s because the church had done the job of educating--of communicating a vision of God's kingdom. Yet, few of those activists could claim that heritage which had nurtured them because it was not being truly acted out in parishes and denominational judiciaries throughout the land. For Christians, this is an appalling thing. For if we are concerned with what God is doing in history, we must then be concerned with what people are doing in history--in each concrete community setting, each nation, the whole world. So we speak of storytelling praxis, the implication being that we are not safe or true to our call out of darkness to the light of discipleship if we do nothing but reflect our God, our heritage, and our eternal salvation. We must recognize that we are not a people suspended in time--in static imperturb-

ableness--but we are active, have already acted, will act again. Is this action Christian? Is it true to our images and our understanding of God as revealed and experienced in history? These questions must be at the heart of our storytelling praxis.

The "loop" proposed by the Stewards is immensely helpful here: Action-Reflection-Action. What have we done?--Is it God's will?--What shall we do in light of our reflection now? Whole systems, entire models need to be revised and reconstructed. For, human community--all reality--is social. I cannot change, cannot be truly loving, truly just, if I try to do so on my own with a change of heart. Contexts must be changed, a powerful vision of God must be called upon (or allowed to grasp me) in a communal style, ever widening in its impact as it revolves around the central focus--the originating event of Jesus Christ, the pole of service, of discipleship, of obedience, of love.

We need a storytelling praxis that can prepare us to sacrifice and risk our very style of existence, our precious wealth, our comfortable pews. Such a storytelling praxis will speak to a world of tragedy. We need a storytelling praxis that can turn us toward hope, toward fullness of life, toward ultimate meaning, toward God. Such a storytelling praxis will speak to a world of joy.

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APPENDIX

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Appendix 1

A MEDITATION

An expert in the interpretation of scriptures asked Jesus, "What must I do to experience abundant life?" And Jesus replied. "You tell me!" And he answered, "You must love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength; and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus commented, "Do that, and you will live."

The following thoughts are not "out for adoption," but only for consideration:

The scripture does not say you must love yourself; rather it assumes that you already do, and that your love of self is an appropriate measure for your love of neighbor, and love of God.

The fact is, I do love myself. The self I am is precious to me because the self I am IS me. The fact is, you do love your self. The self you are is precious to you because the self you are IS you.

The self I am is NOT my body; but I use my body in every aspect of self-expression.

The self I am is NOT my talents; but I use my talents to make every form of self-expression as productive as my development of them will permit.

The self I am is NOT my appearance, my performance, or the products of my activity; for these are more the measure of the equipment I have at my disposal, and the opportunities available for its development and use, than they are a measure of ME.

I LOVE the self I am; I USE the equipment I have at my disposal.

The self I am is EQUAL in worth to the self you are. The equipment I have available to me is UNEQUAL in strength and capacity to the equipment available to you.

To love you (my neighbor) is to perceive you as an EQUALLY WORTHFUL self--is to see the self you are to be as precious as the self I am.

Love is NOT a response to a body; otherwise, selves with unhealthy, unshapely bodies would get little or no love.

Love is NOT a response to intelligence; otherwise, selves with moronic or demonic minds would get little or no love.

Love is NOT a response to talent; otherwise, one-talent selves would get little or no love.

Love is NOT a response to appearance, performance or products; otherwise, selves with mediocre equipment, and only slight opportunity for its development and use, would get little or no love.

Love is my perception of you as a precious self, NO MATTER WHAT equipment you have, or how you use it. Body, mind, talents, performance determine only the way of RELATING; love is the ATTITUDE in which it is done.

For me to love you, and for you to love me, AS WE LOVE THE SELF EACH IS, is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. But all self-expression is imperfect because all equipment is finite; and so all loving is also imperfect, EXCEPT ONE'S LOVE OF THE SELF HE/SHE IS. That's INNATE--PERFECT!

Appendix 2

WHAT IS REAL?

The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew that they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the Skin Horse understand all about it.

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become REAL."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

"I suppose you are Real?" said the Rabbit. And then he wished he had not said it, for he thought the Skin Horse might be sensitive. But the Skin Horse only smiled.

"The Boy's Uncle made me Real," he said. "That was a great many years ago; but once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."

The Rabbit sighed. He thought it would be a long time before this magic called Real happened to him. He longed to become Real, to know what it felt like; and yet the idea of growing shabby and losing his eyes and whiskers was rather sad. He wished that he could become it without these uncomfortable things happening to him.

Margery Williams, The Velveteen Rabbit (New York: Doubleday, 1975).

Appendix 3

MOSES' ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

Moses was minding the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, priest of Midian. He led the flock along the side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in this flame of a burning bush. Moses noticed that, although the bush was on fire, it was not being burnt up; so he said to himself, "I must go across to see this wonderful sight. Why does not the bush burn away?" When the LORD saw that Moses had turned aside to look, he called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses." And Moses answered, "Yes, I am here." God said, "Come no nearer; take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is Holy Ground." Then He said, "I am the God of your forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." Moses covered his face, for he was afraid to gaze on God.

The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their outcry against their slave-masters. I have taken heed of their sufferings, and have come down to rescue them from the power of Egypt, and to bring them up out of that country into a fine, broad land; it is a land flowing with milk and honey.

"Come now, I will send you to Pharaoh and you shall bring my people Israel out of Egypt." "But who am I," Moses said to God, "That I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" God answered, "I am with you. This shall be the proof that it is I who have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall all worship God here on this mountain."

Then Moses said to God, "If I go to the Israelites and tell them that the God of their forefathers has sent me to them, and they ask me his name, what shall I say?" God answered, "I AM; that is who I am. Tell them that I AM has sent you to them." And God said further, "You must tell the Israelites this, that it is JEHOVAH the God of their forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, who has sent you to them."

Moses answered, "But they will never believe me or listen to me; they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to

to you.'" The LORD said, "What have you there in your hand?" "A staff," Moses answered. The LORD said, "Throw it on the ground." Moses threw it down and it turned into a snake. He ran away from it, but the LORD said, "Put your hand out and seize it by the tail." He did so and gripped it firmly, and it turned back into a staff in his hand. "This is to convince the people that the LORD the God of of their forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."

But Moses said, "O LORD, I have never been a man of ready speech, never in my life, not even now that Thou hast spoken to me; I am slow and hesitant of speech." The LORD said to him, "Who is it that gives man speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf? Who makes him clear-sighted or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Go now; I will help your speech and tell you what to say." But Moses still protested, "No Lord, send whom thou wilt." At this the LORD grew angry with Moses and said, "Have you not a brother Aaron the Levite? He, I know, will do all the speaking. He is already on his way out to meet you, and he will be glad indeed to see you. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; I will help both of you to speak and tell you both what to do."

Exodus 3: 1-8a; 10-12, 13-15
4: 1-5; 10-16.

New English Bible

Appendix 4

THE "SUBJECTIVE STANDPOINT" OF JESUS

John Dunne proposes that we may pass over to the subjective standpoint of Jesus by attempting to enter into sympathy with Jesus and experiencing what he might have experienced. Since most Biblical scholars would deny that we can come anywhere near close to Jesus' own standpoint, I have included Dunne's conjectures in an appendix. His ideas seem helpful to me for at least getting in touch with the Gospel writers' standpoint on Jesus' standpoint. By entering into these literary accounts about Jesus imaginatively we may begin to perceive the work of Christ and be touched in a self-transcending way by the power of Christ. In so doing we engage in our own hermeneutic.

Dunne focuses on "significant turning points in Jesus' life" revolving around John the Baptist:

I. The Meeting with John to Be Baptized

Each evangelist views this event from his faith perspective as confirmation of Jesus as God's son, understood somewhat differently by each. We may imaginatively pass over from their respective standpoints to "Jesus' standpoint" by attending closely to the fact of his presenting himself for the baptism of repentance, ready in that moment to accept the condemnation of the past and to set the future against the past. Instead, he received unconditional acceptance. He then spent some time in the desert getting further in touch with what it could mean to be "God's son," God's "beloved." The temptation was to presume upon such favor. But Jesus refused. Again, this we may glean from passing over imaginatively to "Jesus' own standpoint," whereas from the standpoint of the evangelists this was an overcoming of the temptations Israel could not resist in the desert.

II. The Imprisonment of John the Baptist

This was the signal to Jesus to begin to preach, starting with a very similar message: "the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1.15). This message is transformed by the kind of relationship Jesus had with God (Abba) and his encouragement of

people to enter into that kind of intimate relationship. A key in this period of Jesus' life is the meaning of "kingdom." The evangelists' standpoint would be that of Jesus as Risen Lord. From "Jesus' own standpoint" at this time in his life, "the coming of God's kingdom would be the new situation that comes about as he communicates to others what he himself received at his baptism, God's unconditional acceptance."*

III. John's Death

John's death perhaps caused Jesus to contemplate the reality and meaning of his own death, which must now seem imminent. Jesus apparently saw himself as a prophet who must die, as had others before him, in Jerusalem (Luke 13.31ff). From the standpoint of the evangelists, certainly Jesus' death made sense--for theirs was a faith in the Risen Lord. But for Jesus, perhaps all he could say was: "Beloved, we are now children of God and it has not yet been manifested what we shall be" (I John 3.2).

*John Dunne, A Search for God in Time and Memory (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 11.

Appendix 5

CHARACTERISTIC DIMENSIONS OF CONVERSION
EXPERIENCES

There are four important dimensions to the story of Moses' encounter with God which are characteristic of true conversion experiences:

I. Dialogue

God spoke--Moses answered--God spoke--Moses answered: they held a conversation.

Moses was addressed by his name. In turn, God revealed God's own name. The revelation of that name involves tremendous new insight into life: Yahweh says, "I AM the ONE who hears the cries of oppression, who will intervene on behalf of my people to deliver them from the land of Egypt and bring them toward a glorious future. . . ." The Word of insight involves one's identity, lack, need, and new possibilities.

II. Decision

God demanded a great deal of change--from the peaceful life of a shepherd to the intense life of a mediator between the court and a slave people. Change is tough, involving a great many unknowns and perhaps some loss of privilege or prestige, as well as demanding the development of some new skills.

In the face of these demands a choice must be made. Such a choice begins with repentance, that is, turning to God and submitting to God's will. Such a choice ends in commitment to change in creative ways (see IV below).

III. Community

God was not just speaking to Moses, but to the whole people, Israel. The myriad of traditions that have been brought together to form the entire narrative about Moses as we now have it are held together by an understanding of Israel as a whole community of the people of God.

So in Christianity community is of utmost importance. The revealed Word of Insight provided meaning within a specific context. In this community with a history, then, the Word can be checked for validity. For Moses, the Word was quite valid and indicated that God listens to the whole community. God is not aloof from the human scene, but takes part in human affairs.

IV. Task

Moses' decision meant acceptance of a task--to confront Pharaoh with God's demands, to translate God's message so the people of God could hear, to speak the words of liberation. Action is the ultimate result of conversion.

(From a workshop with Loma Mae Chalfant)

Appendix 6

THE PRINCE AND THE MAGICIAN

Once upon a time there was a young prince, who believed in all things but three. He did not believe in princesses, he did not believe in islands, he did not believe in God. His father, the king, told him that such things did not exist. As there were no princesses or islands in his father's domains, and no sign of God, the young prince believed his father.

But then, one day, the prince ran away from his palace. He came to the next land. There, to his astonishment, from every coast he saw islands, and on these islands, strange and troubling creatures whom he dared not name. As he was searching for a boat, a man in full evening dress approached him along the shore.

"Are those real islands?" asked the young prince.

"Of course they are real islands," said the man in evening dress.

"And those strange and troubling creatures?"

"They are all genuine and authentic princesses."

"Then God also must exist!" cried the prince.

"I am God," replied the man in full evening dress, with a bow.

The young prince returned home as quickly as he could.

"So you are back," said his father, the king.

"I have seen islands, I have seen princesses, I have seen God," said the prince reproachfully.

The king was unmoved.

"Neither real islands, nor real princesses, nor a real God, exist."

"I saw them!"

"Tell me how God was dressed."

"God was in full evening dress."

"Were the sleeves of his coat rolled back?"

The prince remembered that they had been. The king smiled.

"That is the uniform of a magician. You have been deceived."

At this, the prince returned to the next land, and went to the same shore, where once again he came upon the man in full evening dress.

"My father the king has told me who you are," said the young prince indignantly. "You deceived me last time, but not again. Now I know that those are not real islands and real princesses, because you are a magician."

The man on the shore smiled.

"It is you who are deceived, my boy. In your father's kingdom there are many islands and many princesses. But you are under your father's spell, so you cannot see them."

The prince returned pensively home. When he saw his father, he looked him in the eyes.

"Father, is it true that you are not a real king, but only a magician?"

The king smiled, and rolled back his sleeves.

"Yes, my son, I am only a magician."

"Then the man on the shore was God."

"The man on the shore was another magician."

"I must know the real truth, the truth beyond magic."

"There is no truth beyond magic," said the king.

The prince was full of sadness.

He said, "I will kill myself."

The king by magic caused death to appear. Death stood in the door and beckoned to the prince. The prince shuddered. He remembered the beautiful but unreal islands, and the unreal but beautiful princesses.

"Very well," he said. "I can bear it."

"You see, my son," said the king, "you too now begin to be a magician."

John Fowles, The Magus (New York: Dell, 1979), pp. 560-562.

Appendix 7

ELIJAH'S TRANSLATION

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. And Elijah said to Elisha, "Tarry here, I pray you; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."

So they went down to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take away your master from over you?" And he said, "Yes, I know it; hold your peace."

Elijah said to him, "Elisha, tarry here, I pray you, for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."

So they came to Jericho. The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take away your master from over you?" And he answered, "Yes I know it; hold your peace."

Then Elijah said to him, "Tarry here, I pray you; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."

So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle, and rolled it up, and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "I pray you, let me inherit a double share of your spirit." And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if you do not see me, it shall not be so." And as they still went on and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And

Elisha saw it and he cried, "My father, my father! the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more.

Then he took hold of his own clothes and rent them in two pieces. And he took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other; and Elisha went over.

II Kings 2.1-14
(Revised Standard Version)